

# **Southeast Region Youth Expedition**

Oklahoma Family Network

FY26

# Fiscal Year FY26 Funding Request

**Project/Activity:** Southeast Region Youth Expedition

**Organization:** Oklahoma Family Network

**Proposal Description:**

The *Southeast Region Youth Expedition* will continue its successful leadership and advocacy model to reach more youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities (ID/DD) and their families across rural eastern Oklahoma. Oklahoma Family Network (OFN) will implement a coordinated series of activities designed to strengthen self-advocacy, employment readiness, and community inclusion for youth ages 14 and older. The program will include interactive workshops, caregiver training, and public engagement opportunities that align with the Oklahoma Developmental Disabilities Council’s priorities.

The project will engage at least 50 youth participants and 40 caregivers through both in-person and virtual activities. OFN will partner with the Autism Foundation of Oklahoma, the Choctaw Nation, and local educational and vocational programs to expand access and sustain post-program support. Evaluation will include pre- and post-surveys, attendance tracking, facilitator assessments, and partner feedback to measure progress. Target outcomes include 80% of youth reporting improved self-advocacy and 70% showing measurable growth in leadership and employment readiness skills. The Youth Expedition will strengthen Oklahoma’s pipeline of disability leaders and create more inclusive rural communities.

**Council Goal & Objective:** Access to Services

**Targeted Audience:** The Southeast Region Youth Expedition will primarily serve young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (ID/DD), ages 14 and older, living in rural eastern Oklahoma. This includes LeFlore County and surrounding areas such as Sequoyah, Haskell, Latimer, Adair, and Cherokee counties—regions that often face significant barriers to accessing disability-related services.

### Funding requested for Fiscal Year FY26

Council	Match (in kind)	Total
<b>\$24,500</b>	<b>\$10,925</b>	<b>\$35,425</b>



# FY27 Funding Requests

## Full Year Projects

Autism Foundation of Oklahoma  
AutismOklahoma  
Best Buddies  
Har-Ber Village  
OUHSC OK Autism Center  
OUHSC Sooner SUCCESS  
Theodore E Parker Foundation  
Valentina Guitierrez  
Zarrow Center

Job Readiness  
LookOut Art Program  
OKC Expansion  
Sensory Project  
Training Providers  
Caregiver Retreats, Sibling Camps  
Gardening & Life-Skills Program  
Blend Ability Episode  
Outreach Coordinator

Job Readiness and Family Empowerment Program

Autism Foundation of Oklahoma

# Fiscal Year FY27 Funding Request

**Project/Activity:** Job Readiness and Family Empowerment Program

**Organization:** Autism Foundation of Oklahoma

**Proposal Description:** The Autism Foundation of Oklahoma (AFO) seeks funding to expand its Job Readiness and Family Empowerment Program, providing youth and young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) essential workplace skills. The program teaches soft skills—communication, relationship-building, appropriate attire, financial literacy, self-advocacy—and supports executive functioning, while also equipping parents and caregivers to reinforce these skills and advocate for inclusive employment. By bridging gaps in existing transition services, this initiative fosters workforce representation, independence, and greater public recognition of the value of individuals with I/DD.

Many youth with I/DD are excluded from state-supported transition services due to eligibility requirements, leaving families without affordable options and perpetuating unemployment and social invisibility. AFO addresses these barriers through accessible, flexible workshops offered in person and online: four sessions for youth focused on job readiness and executive functioning, and four sessions for parents and caregivers emphasizing advocacy, skill reinforcement, and peer networking. The program targets populations in the Oklahoma City and Tulsa metro areas, including rural communities where specialized services are scarce.

Expected outcomes include measurable improvements in youth confidence, workplace readiness, and executive functioning, as well as enhanced caregiver knowledge and advocacy skills. By increasing the visibility and representation of individuals with I/DD in workplaces and communities, the program aims to shift public perceptions, reduce stigma, and promote inclusive employment opportunities. Success will be tracked through pre- and post-surveys, attendance, completion data, and participant feedback, ensuring accountability and demonstrating broader impact on equity, access, and inclusion across Oklahoma.

**Council Goal & Objective:** Representation and Public Attitudes

**Targeted Audience:** This project serves youth and young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD), ages 14–26, along with their parents and caregivers who support workplace readiness and advocacy. Focused on the Oklahoma City and Tulsa metro areas, including rural communities, it targets families who often lack access to affordable transition and job readiness programs.

## Funding requested for Fiscal Year FY27

Council	Match (in kind)	Total
<b>\$25,000</b>	<b>\$8,334</b>	<b>\$33,334</b>

# **LookOut Art Program**

AutismOklahoma

# Fiscal Year FY27 Funding Request

**Project/Activity:** LookOut Program

**Organization:** AutismOklahoma

**Proposal Description:** This proposal seeks funding to expand an inclusive, community-based art program serving individuals of all ages with developmental disabilities. The program integrates adaptive art classes, artist mentorship, and public exhibitions to provide participants with structured opportunities for creative expression, skill development, and social connection. Classes will be led by trained instructors using accessible materials, while mentorship pairs participants with local artists for individualized guidance, portfolio development, and encouragement. Public exhibitions and community events will showcase participants' artwork, increase visibility, and promote inclusion within the broader community.

Planned activities include outreach to 25 new artist participants, three submission events to recruit emerging artists, and the addition of four new art classes in the Tulsa area. At least one major exhibition will highlight the collaborative work of participants and mentors, providing a platform for public engagement and recognition. These program components are designed to strengthen participants' creative abilities, confidence, and sense of belonging, while simultaneously fostering public awareness of the talents of individuals with developmental disabilities.

Expected outcomes include improved self-expression, fine motor and communication skills, social connectedness, and portfolio development that could lead to vocational or entrepreneurial opportunities. For the community, the program will enhance appreciation of diverse artistic abilities, reduce stigma, and expand inclusion in cultural events. Program evaluation will track attendance, mentorship hours, portfolio development, pre- and post-surveys, and community feedback to measure impact and inform ongoing program growth. This expansion represents a strategic opportunity to increase access to lifelong art programming and further embed inclusive practices within the local arts ecosystem.

**Council Goal & Objective:** Access to Services

**Targeted Audience:** Our primary audience includes individuals with autism or other developmental disabilities, aged 10 to 50, who are either practicing or aspiring artists and filmmakers, with filmmakers aged 18 and above. While focused on autism, the program is inclusive of all artists with developmental disabilities, emphasizing shared resources, community connection, and opportunities for participants to realize their creative potential.

**Funding requested for Fiscal Year FY27**

Council	Match (in kind)	Total
<b>\$15,000</b>	<b>\$19,000</b>	<b>\$34,000</b>

Prior Fiscal Year FY26

Council	Match (in kind)	Total
\$18,000	\$16,000	\$34,000

Prior Fiscal Year FY25

Council	Match (in kind)	Total
\$24,000	\$10,000	\$34,000



# Best Buddies Program Growth Initiative

Best Buddies in Oklahoma

# Fiscal Year FY27 Funding Request

**Project/Activity:** Best Buddies Program Growth Initiative

**Organization:** Best Buddies in Oklahoma

**Proposal Description:** In the coming year, the Best Buddies Program Growth Initiative will focus on expanding its reach and deepening its impact across Oklahoma City schools. Building on the success of the 2025 Expansion Project, the initiative will establish five new school chapters, recruit and engage at least 100 students, and conduct 20 group activities that promote inclusion and friendship between youth with and without intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). These new chapters will create opportunities for at least 25 students with IDD, including five in leadership roles, to build friendships, develop confidence, and strengthen essential communication and social skills.

Each new chapter will function as a student-led club supported by trained faculty advisors and guided by Best Buddies staff. Student and faculty leaders will participate in multiple training sessions focused on fostering one-to-one friendships, planning inclusive activities, and ensuring chapter sustainability. Throughout the year, Best Buddies staff will provide continued mentorship, online resources, and leadership transition support to ensure that chapters remain active and thriving beyond their first year.

Through these efforts, Best Buddies aims to cultivate inclusive school communities that prepare students with IDD for success in college, employment, and independent living. The organization will measure success through participation numbers, leadership development milestones, and participant feedback—building on survey results showing strong satisfaction and positive school climate impacts. Ultimately, this year’s initiative will strengthen the foundation for long-term inclusion and friendship in schools and communities across Oklahoma.

**Council Goal & Objective:** Representation and Public Attitudes

**Targeted Audience:** The target population for the project includes elementary school, middle school, and high school students with and without IDD, aged approximately 11 to 18 years, in the greater Oklahoma City area. We expect that the project will serve a minimum of 100 students with and without IDD.

## Funding requested for Fiscal Year FY27

Council	Match (in kind)	Total
<b>\$25,000</b>	<b>\$8,334</b>	<b>\$33,334</b>

**Prior Fiscal Year FY26**

Council	Match (in kind)	Total
<b>\$25,000</b>	<b>\$8,333</b>	<b>\$33,333</b>

**Prior Fiscal Year FY25**

Council	Match (in kind)	Total
<b>\$25,000</b>	<b>\$8,333</b>	<b>\$33,333</b>



# **Retreat Room**

Har-Ber Village

# Fiscal Year FY27 Funding Request

**Project/Activity:** Retreat Room

**Organization:** Har-Ber Village

**Proposal Description:** Har-Ber Village Museum seeks funding to create a sensory-friendly Retreat Room—a quiet, calming space where visitors, especially neurodivergent and trauma-affected youth, can regulate and rejoin activities with confidence. Located at the heart of the Village, the Retreat Room will feature soft lighting, acoustic treatments, fidgets, noise-reducing headphones, and nature elements to promote calm and inclusion. The project will also include youth co-design workshops, trauma-informed staff training, and clear wayfinding to ensure the space is welcoming, sustainable, and responsive to visitor needs. This initiative directly addresses increasing reports of sensory overload during school and public visits, ensuring equitable access to informal education for individuals with developmental disabilities.

The project’s first year will focus on design, implementation, and evaluation. Within 12 months, Har-Ber Village will launch the Retreat Room, integrate sensory kits and visual schedules across school programs, and train all staff and volunteers in inclusive, trauma-informed guest care. Additional outreach components—such as resource days and family navigation materials—will connect caregivers to SoonerStart, DDS, and tribal services. Measurable goals include a 20% reduction in early departures due to sensory overload, a 20% increase in teacher confidence when including students with developmental disabilities, and over 150 families receiving navigation assistance.

Beyond serving local visitors, this project will create a replicable model for rural museums seeking to improve accessibility and inclusion. Documented best practices, such as sensory kit contents, staff scripts, and operational workflows, will be shared through a free “Sensory-Ready Venue Starter” guide. By normalizing sensory supports and connecting families to services, Har-Ber Village will strengthen community participation, shift public attitudes toward inclusion, and help every visitor—especially those with developmental disabilities—feel seen, supported, and welcome.

**Council Goal & Objective:** Equitable Access

**Targeted Audience:** Visitors with developmental disabilities—especially autistic youth and those with sensory processing differences—plus their caregivers and teachers during school visits and public hours at Har-Ber Village.

## Funding requested for Fiscal Year FY27

Council	Match (in kind)	Total
<b>\$25,000</b>	<b>\$3,000</b>	<b>\$28,000</b>

Training Early Care and Education Providers  
Autism Center of Oklahoma – Early Access

# Fiscal Year FY27 Funding Request

**Project/Activity:** Training Early Care and Education Providers

**Organization:** Autism Center of Oklahoma – Early Access

**Proposal Description:** This project expands the Oklahoma Autism Center’s efforts to strengthen early identification, family support, and inclusion for young children with developmental differences. Building on existing success, the initiative will increase access to evidence-based training for early care and education providers using a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) model. The training equips providers to create inclusive classrooms, address behavioral and sensory needs, and partner with families to ensure children under age five have access to high-quality early learning opportunities, with expanded reach to Head Start, Early Head Start, and rural and underserved communities through in-person and virtual options.

The program includes three progressive levels of training and consultation. Level 1 provides universal training on inclusive practices, developmental monitoring, and positive behavior supports; Level 2 offers targeted workshops based on provider self-assessment and classroom needs; and Level 3 delivers individualized consultation for providers serving children with developmental delays or disabilities. Pilot outcomes show strong effectiveness, with knowledge of inclusion strategies increasing from 36% to 75% and confidence using positive behavior supports rising from 36% to 69%, which the expanded project will build on to reduce early childhood expulsions and improve developmental outcomes.

Evaluation will measure changes in provider knowledge, confidence, and implementation of inclusive strategies, along with improvements in children’s participation and classroom outcomes. The project aligns with the Developmental Disabilities Council of Oklahoma’s goals for access to services, inclusive education, and system change. By embedding developmental monitoring, screening, and inclusion practices into early childhood systems, this initiative promotes sustainable improvements that ensure children with developmental differences are identified early, supported effectively, and fully included.

**Council Goal & Objective:** Access to Services, Inclusive Education

**Targeted Audience:** Level 1 training on autism, developmental monitoring, screening, and positive behavior supports will serve providers working with children from birth to age 18, with emphasis on those caring for children under five. Levels 2 and 3 will provide targeted coaching and consultation to early care providers and families, expanding access statewide—especially in rural and underserved areas—to strengthen early identification, inclusion, and support.

## Funding requested for Fiscal Year FY27

Council	Match (in kind)	Total
<b>\$135,532</b>	<b>\$45,305</b>	<b>\$180,837</b>

# **Gardening and Life-Skills Program**

Theodore E. Parker Foundation

# Fiscal Year FY27 Funding Request

**Project/Activity:** Gardening and Life-Skills Program

**Organization:** Theodore E. Parker Foundation

**Proposal Description:** The Theodore E. Parker Foundation requests \$3,750 to implement an inclusive, community-based gardening and life-skills program for individuals with developmental disabilities in Tulsa and Wagoner counties. The proposed project addresses a documented gap in accessible, hands-on opportunities that build independence, routine, confidence, and meaningful community participation outside of clinical or school-based settings. Through structured gardening activities and guided life-skills instruction, participants will engage in real-world tasks that promote responsibility, teamwork, self-determination, and inclusion, aligning directly with the Developmental Disabilities Council of Oklahoma (DDCO) 5-Year State Plan priorities.

The program will serve at least 20 youth and young adults ages 14–30 with a range of developmental disabilities, including autism and intellectual disabilities. Activities will include garden planning, planting, maintenance, and harvest-based lessons, supported by adaptive tools and accessible materials to ensure full participation. The project will be led by the Theodore E. Parker Foundation, with support from community partners experienced in agriculture, logistics, and hands-on programming. Outcomes will be measured through attendance, facilitator observations, and participant and caregiver feedback, with specific goals focused on increased engagement, confidence, task completion, and participation in inclusive community activities.

This proposal does not duplicate existing services but instead adds value by offering a low-cost, replicable model that emphasizes experiential learning, ability-based participation, and community inclusion. Funding will support program facilitation, gardening supplies, educational materials, outreach, and required reporting, with no funds allocated for transportation. By demonstrating how inclusive, non-clinical, community-centered activities can effectively build practical life skills and self-determination, this project offers measurable impact, sustainability, and alignment with DDCO’s goals for independence, productivity, and inclusion.

**Council Goal & Objective:** Equitable Access

**Targeted Audience:** Youth and young adults ages 14–30 with a range of developmental disabilities, including autism and intellectual disabilities

## Funding requested for Fiscal Year FY27

Council	Match (in kind)	Total
<b>\$3,750</b>	<b>\$1,250</b>	<b>\$5,000</b>

## **Blend Ability Episode**

VGM Visual Storytelling, Valentina Gutierrez

# Fiscal Year FY27 Funding Request

**Project/Activity:** Blend Ability Series – One Episode

**Organization:** VGM Visual Storytelling, Valentina Gutierrez

**Proposal Description:** *Blend Ability* began as an award-winning short documentary about a coffee shop in Oklahoma employing people of all abilities. Building on that success, this project seeks funding to expand into a six-episode documentary series (10–15 minutes each) highlighting individuals with developmental disabilities and their experiences with employment. Each episode will feature diverse subjects, across gender, disability, and type of work, showcasing both the barriers they face and the unique strengths they bring, challenging misconceptions and promoting understanding that inclusive hiring benefits both individuals and communities.

The series will combine storytelling with practical solutions, featuring in-depth interviews, workplace footage, and authentic narratives that emphasize dignity and ability. Each episode will include a guided framework for HR professionals and business leaders, offering tools, resources, and best practices to advance inclusive hiring. With a budget of \$33,334 per episode, *Blend Ability* will be released progressively online and shared with corporations, HR departments, and diversity programs to maximize reach and impact.

Anticipated outcomes include increased public understanding of employment barriers, stronger representation of people with developmental disabilities, and direct commitments from businesses to expand inclusive hiring. Success will be measured through viewership, engagement, festival recognition, and reported employment actions by participating organizations. Ultimately, *Blend Ability* aims to drive long-term systems change, embedding inclusion into workplace culture, influencing HR practices, and shaping public attitudes toward individuals with developmental disabilities as capable, valuable contributors.

**Council Goal & Objective:** Advocacy and Self-Advocacy

**Targeted Audience:** The *Blend Ability* series aims to uplift individuals with developmental disabilities by sharing their stories and affirming their value in the workforce. At the same time, it targets HR professionals and business leaders, providing tools and insights to promote inclusive hiring practices. By also engaging the general public, the series seeks to reduce stigma and build a culture where inclusive employment is expected and celebrated.

## Funding requested for Fiscal Year FY27

Council	Match (in kind)	Total
<b>\$25,000</b>	<b>\$8,334</b>	<b>\$33,334</b>

## Outreach Coordinator

The Zarrow Institute on Transition and Self-Determination at the University of Oklahoma

# Fiscal Year FY27 Funding Request

**Project/Activity:** Outreach Coordinator

**Organization:** Zarrow Institute on Transition & Self-Determination at OU

**Proposal Description:** The Zarrow Institute on Transition and Self-Determination at the University of Oklahoma seeks to expand its inclusive education and advocacy efforts through the creation of a dedicated Outreach Coordinator position. Building on the success of Sooner Works and SPARK360°, which provide individualized academic and social supports to students with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) and autism, this project will extend inclusion beyond program participants to the broader university community. As enrollment and visibility of neurodiverse students increase, there is a growing need for coordinated, university-wide training to equip faculty, staff, and employers with effective inclusive practices.

The Outreach Coordinator will lead a comprehensive inclusion initiative that unites and expands existing efforts across OU's Norman, Health Sciences Center, and Tulsa campuses. This role will deliver workshops on inclusive teaching, Universal Design for Learning, and workplace accommodations; coordinate campus-wide advocacy initiatives such as Inclusion Week and student-led panels; and build partnerships with employers and community organizations to increase inclusive internships, hiring practices, and mentorship opportunities. In Year 1, the project will conduct at least 12 educational sessions reaching over 250 participants and establish or expand partnerships with at least 10 employers and community organizations.

Evaluation will track participation, knowledge gains, confidence levels, and indicators of systems change, such as new departmental policies or increased requests for inclusion training. This project aligns with DDCO priorities in Inclusive Education and Advocacy and Self-Advocacy by embedding inclusive practices into daily university operations and community partnerships. By formalizing outreach under a unified strategy, the Zarrow Institute will strengthen support for neurodiverse students and foster a campus culture where inclusion is a standard part of academic and professional life.

**Council Goal & Objective:** Inclusive Education, Representation and Public Attitudes, and Advocacy and Self-Advocacy

**Targeted Audience:** The initiative will serve students with intellectual and developmental disabilities and autism, along with the faculty, staff, student organizations, and employers who support them.

## Funding requested for Fiscal Year FY27

Council	Match (in kind)	Total
<b>\$101,602</b>	<b>\$52,743</b>	<b>\$154,345</b>



January 16, 2026

**What is the percentage of students who are in their programs (Sooner Works and Spark360°) that are from Oklahoma. From what other states do the students hail?**

Numbers current as of 1/15/2026. Enrollment changed slightly over semester break.

Sooner Works (N=23)

Oklahoma	12	52%
Texas	11	48%

Anticipated 2026-2027 numbers (27-28)

Oklahoma	~ 16	59%
Texas	~ 12	41%

\*based upon early admission and current applications

- current senior cohort has 1 OK resident and 3 TX students; anticipated freshman cohort (26-27) includes 5 OK students and 4 TX students.

SPARK360° (N=16)

Oklahoma	12	75%
Texas	3	19%
Colorado	1	6%

Anticipated 2026-2027 numbers (~24; 20 are confirmed)

Oklahoma	~ 13	65%
Texas	6	30%
Colorado	1	5%

\*based upon early admission and current applications

**How will you measure and report both short and long-term outcomes?**

**Short Term Outcomes Measures**

GOAL 1: Establish Project and hire Outreach Coordinator

- Target data of hired Outreach Coordinator
- 2026 evaluation data of Outreach Coordinator



# ZARROW INSTITUTE ON TRANSITION & SELF-DETERMINATION

*The UNIVERSITY of OKLAHOMA*

GOAL 2: Equip OU faculty and staff with practical strategies for supporting SwDD in academic and workplace environments

- September all faculty/staff survey (knowledge of Programs and Resources)
- Attendance logs
- Post training satisfaction and learning survey (anticipated 10 min survey at end of training)
- Data metrics on OU Inclusion Hub website/resources (i.e website hits, downloads)

GOAL 3: Build sustainable partnerships among on-campus internship sites, academic units, and campus-based student organizations. (n=10+)

- Lists of partnerships: 1. Connected with and 2. Partnered with
- End of Year surveys (send May 2027) to partnered organization/units to determine 1. Level of satisfaction, 2. What worked and 3. Recommendations for next year
- Strategic interviews with targeted participants

GOAL 4: Increase student led advocacy (n=3+)

- Documented advocacy materials (available on website)
- Surveys (students in Sooner Works) 1. Satisfaction and 2. Gauge learning
- Surveys (students in SPARK360°) 1. Satisfaction and 2. Gauge learning
- Strategic interviews with targeted participants

### **Long-term Outcomes (measures after completion of this project)**

- Number of applications in Oklahoma vs other states
- Continued: September all faculty/staff survey (knowledge of Programs and Resources)
- Increased partnerships (student organizations, department units, etc)

### **Our Federal Funder sets the cap for indirect costs at 8% (document attached)**

We acknowledge the indirect cost rate of 8%

# Fiscal Year FY27 Funding Request

Project/Activity:

Organization: Sooner Success

Proposal Description:

Council Goal & Objective:

Targeted Audience:

## Funding requested for Fiscal Year FY27

Council	Match (in kind)	Total

## Prior Fiscal Year \_\_\_\_

Council	Match (in kind)	Total

## Prior Fiscal Year \_\_\_\_

Council	Match (in kind)	Total

## Prior Fiscal Year \_\_\_\_

Council	Match (in kind)	Total

## Prior Fiscal Year \_\_\_\_

Council	Match (in kind)	Total