

Using Data and Evidence to Build a Strong Promise Neighborhoods Application

A Guide from Results for America

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The 2026 Promise Neighborhoods competition is one of the federal government's most significant opportunities to improve outcomes for children and families through coordinated, local cradle-to-career strategies in communities facing persistent poverty and barriers to opportunity. The strongest applications will demonstrate how communities will use **evidence, data, partnerships and continuous improvement** to achieve measurable results.

This guide highlights how applicants can use data, evidence and continuous improvement strategies to strengthen the overall quality and competitiveness of their 2026 Promise Neighborhoods application.

The 2026 competition includes:

- **Estimated Available Funds:** \$65 million
- **Expected Number of Awards:** 12
- **Estimated Award Size:** approximately \$4-6 million
- **Project Period:** 60 months (5 years)

Funding opportunity materials: <https://www.grants.gov/search-results-detail/362347>

Application deadline: August 6, 2026

The competition is administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services on behalf of the U.S. Department of Education, and applicants are required to follow the 2025 Common Instructions for Applicants to [Department of Education Discretionary Grant Programs](#) (90 FR 42234).

Applications are scored out of 100 points, with up to 15 additional competitive preference points available.

What the Federal Government Is Looking For

The 2026 Promise Neighborhoods competition emphasizes:

- **Evidence-based strategies**
- **Cross-sector partnerships**
- **Use of data for continuous improvement**
- **Community engagement**
- **Long-term outcomes for children and families**
- **Strong implementation and evaluation capacity**

The federal government expects applicants to demonstrate not only *what* they plan to do, but *why the strategies are likely to work and how progress will be measured over time*.

1. Use Local Data to Strengthen Project Design

Successful applications use local data to not only demonstrate community need, but also to explain how proposed strategies, services and partnerships are designed to improve outcomes for children and families. The federal government specifically requires applicants to conduct a needs analysis using recent local data, identify service gaps, explain barriers communities face in meeting those needs and demonstrate how data informs the selection of strategies and pipeline services.

Strong applications typically use data on:

- Poverty and income
- Academic outcomes
- Chronic absenteeism
- Workforce and earnings
- Housing instability
- Public health
- Youth disconnection

Just as important, competitive applications explain how the data collected for the needs analysis are used to inform strategy selection, partnership design, implementation priorities and the measurable outcomes the project is designed to achieve over time.

2. Connect Local Need to Evidence-Based Strategies

Competitive Promise Neighborhoods applications do more than describe challenges. They clearly connect identified local needs to evidence-based interventions and measurable outcomes in order to increase the

likelihood of achieving improved outcomes. For example, applicants may use local chronic absenteeism data to justify integrated student supports and attendance interventions, connect low literacy proficiency rates to evidence-based tutoring or literacy instruction, or use postsecondary enrollment and youth disconnection data to support career-connected work-based learning and advising strategies.

COMPETITIVE PREFERENCE PRIORITIES TIED TO EVIDENCE-BASED STRATEGIES

The 2026 Promise Neighborhoods competition includes several opportunities for applicants to earn additional competitive preference points tied directly to evidence-based strategies.

Competitive Preference Priority 1: Evidence-Based Literacy

- Up to 5 additional points
- Applicants may receive preference points for projects that incorporate evidence-based literacy instruction into proposed interventions. The federal government defines evidence-based literacy instruction as explicit and systematic literacy instruction supported by strong or moderate evidence.
- Applicants pursuing this priority must identify one or two supporting citations and ensure the evidence is publicly available.

Competitive Preference Priority 2: High-Quality Interventions or Accelerated Learning Supports

- Up to 5 additional points
- Applicants may also receive additional points for implementing evidence-based interventions such as:
 - remedial or accelerated learning opportunities focused on individualized, differentiated and scaffolded supports,
 - high-impact tutoring programs which include innovative delivery models or approaches and
 - outcomes-based contracting or grantmaking.

These competitive preference priorities create a major opportunity for applicants to strengthen proposals by clearly connecting proposed strategies to rigorous evidence and demonstrated outcomes.

3. Treat the Evidence Form as a Strategic Document

The 2026 application package includes a required [Evidence Form](#) for applicants pursuing:

- Competitive Preference Priority 1 (Evidence-Based Literacy), and/or
- Part (a) of Competitive Preference Priority 2 (High-Quality Interventions Accelerated Learning Supports).

Applicants should treat this form as more than a compliance requirement.

Strong submissions clearly explain:

- Why selected interventions are likely to work
- How the evidence aligns with the target population
- How implementation will maintain fidelity to evidence-based practices

Whenever possible, applicants should prioritize studies and interventions reviewed through the [What Works Clearinghouse \(WWC\)](#).

Strong applications will generally be more competitive when they:

- Use interventions supported by strong or moderate evidence
- Select studies closely aligned with the proposed population and setting

4. Build a Strong Data, Measurement and Continuous Improvement Strategy

The federal government expects grantees to continuously collect data, monitor implementation, track outcomes and improve strategies over time.

Applicants should clearly describe:

- Who will manage data systems
- How partners will share and use data
- How findings will inform implementation decisions
- How community voice will shape continuous improvement efforts
- How implementation responsibilities, timelines and partner coordination structures will support successful execution over time

The federal government also requires annual reporting tied to a common set of cradle-to-career indicators, including:

- Kindergarten readiness
- Academic proficiency
- Chronic absenteeism
- Graduation rates
- Postsecondary attainment
- Family engagement
- Student access to broadband and connected devices

Strong applications demonstrate not only the ability to report these outcomes, but also the capacity to use them for learning, accountability and long-term sustainability. Applicants should be prepared

to explain how they will collect reliable and meaningful data and use it to support continuous improvement over the life of the grant. The Urban Institute developed a [guidance document](#) on data collection to support grantees in implementing effective measurement and reporting practices.

5. What Strong Applications Typically Demonstrate

Competitive Promise Neighborhoods applications usually show:

- ❑ **Clear need and strategic alignment:** A compelling, data-backed understanding of local challenges and how proposed strategies are designed to address them.
- ❑ **Strong partnerships:** Clearly defined governance, roles, accountability structures and community engagement.
- ❑ **Evidence-based strategy selection:** Programs and interventions connected to research and measurable outcomes.
- ❑ **Data infrastructure:** Ability to collect, analyze, share and use data across partners, including through data-sharing agreements, when feasible.
- ❑ **Continuous improvement:** A credible plan for learning, adapting and improving implementation over time.
- ❑ **Sustainability:** Plans to align federal, state, local and philanthropic resources beyond the grant period.

The strongest Promise Neighborhoods applications will show reviewers that the community is prepared to use evidence to guide investments, align partners around shared outcomes, measure progress continuously and improve implementation over time. Applicants should think about the application not simply as a grant proposal, but as a long-term strategy for improving economic mobility through evidence-driven community change.

For additional information and resources from Results for America on federal grants, [visit our page](#) dedicated to winning and implementing federal grants with data and evidence.