



**WACO ISD EDUCATION FOUNDATION
COVER SHEET – PART II
Application for Grant:
2025-2026 Funding Cycle**

Assigned Grant Proposal #: _____

Project Title: _____

Grade Level(s): _____ **# of Students DIRECTLY involved:** _____

Subject Area(s): _____

Amount Requested: \$ _____

Grant Focus Area(s): In order to be considered, Waco Education Foundation Innovation Grant proposals must fall under one or more of the E4 focus areas: early childhood development, enhanced programming for advanced students, extended education for staff, and emphasis on student performance. NOTE: In addition to meeting one of the E4 focus areas above, grant readers are especially interested in creative and innovative grant requests that target fine arts, STEM, literacy, or enrichment.

(check all that apply)

Early Childhood Development

Enhanced Programming for Advanced Students

Fine Arts

Literacy

Extended Education for Staff

Emphasis on Student Performance

STEM

Enrichment

Project Description (100 words or less)

Reading to Rescues: Literacy Meets Compassion fosters literacy, emotional growth, and community engagement for struggling readers and students in specialized programs. Partnering with Fuzzy Friends Rescue, this initiative provides a nonjudgmental space where students read aloud to rescue animals, boosting confidence and emotional regulation. Students will attend up to four times a month in September, October, February, March, and April; twice a month in December and January; and twice in May, culminating in a celebration. Each session includes up to 12 students and two adults. This program enhances literacy skills, builds empathy, and supports animal welfare, allowing students to grow academically and personally.

Rationale

Reading to Rescues: Literacy Meets Compassion aligns with the Waco Education Foundation's Project by offering an innovative approach to literacy development, emotional growth, and student engagement. It supports the Rewards for Results initiative by providing struggling readers and students in specialized programs with a nonjudgmental environment to practice literacy, fostering measurable academic and social-emotional progress.

This project also aligns with District and Campus Improvement Plans, emphasizing literacy growth, social-emotional learning (SEL), and community engagement. According to the National Institute for Literacy, students who struggle with reading are four times more likely to drop out of school. Additionally, research from the American Psychological Association indicates that interactions with animals reduce stress and anxiety while improving emotional regulation.

Currently, 40% of Waco ISD students perform below grade level in reading. Many students in Resource, ACHIEVE, SAIL, and SIT reading programs require alternative learning environments to build confidence and fluency. Reading to Rescues: Literacy Meets Compassion provides a unique, research-backed intervention that fosters literacy skills while improving student motivation, responsibility, and empathy. Partnering with Fuzzy Friends Rescue, this initiative offers a nonjudgmental space where students read aloud to rescue animals, boosting confidence and emotional regulation. According to the Humane Society of Missouri (Shelter Buddies), animals that are read to are more likely to be adopted sooner as they become more comfortable and less fearful in their kennels. By integrating reading with animal interaction, the project enhances student learning, emotional well-being, and community connection in a meaningful and engaging way.

Goals

1. Increase Reading Fluency & Comprehension:
 - Students will demonstrate measurable improvement in reading fluency and comprehension based on pre- and post-program assessments.
 - Targeted growth: 10-15% increase in fluency scores over the program duration.
2. Enhance Confidence & Emotional Regulation:
 - 80% of participating students will report feeling more comfortable reading aloud.
 - Decrease in anxiety-related behaviors associated with reading tasks in the classroom.
3. Develop Empathy & Responsibility:
 - Students will demonstrate increased awareness of animal welfare and emotional well-being.
 - 100% of students will complete a reflection activity on how reading to animals impacts their confidence and emotions.
4. Community Engagement & Lifelong Learning:

- Foster stronger community ties between Waco ISD and Fuzzy Friends Rescue.
- Inspire continued volunteerism and responsibility beyond the program.

By integrating literacy with emotional and social development, *Reading to Rescues* will provide a transformative learning experience, ensuring students not only become better readers but also more confident, compassionate individuals.

Plan of Operation:

Objectives:

1. Improve reading fluency, comprehension, and confidence in struggling readers.
2. Develop emotional regulation and coping skills through structured reading sessions.
3. Foster empathy, responsibility, and community engagement by interacting with rescue animals.
4. Strengthen school-community partnerships between Waco ISD and Fuzzy Friends Rescue.
5. Encourage parental and volunteer involvement in student literacy development.

Activities & Strategies:

1. Reading Sessions (Core Activity)
 - Groups of up to 12 students and 2 adults visit Fuzzy Friends Rescue once a week starting in September as the school calendar provides.
 - Students select age-appropriate books and read aloud to rescue animals in a quiet, structured setting.
 - Educators track student progress through reading logs and observation.
2. Pre- and Post-Assessment of Literacy Growth
 - Students complete a baseline reading fluency and comprehension assessment before program participation.
 - A final assessment will measure progress in fluency, comprehension, and confidence.
3. Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Integration
 - Students engage in discussions and journaling about confidence, perseverance, and empathy.
 - SEL lessons connect reading struggles to resilience-building strategies and positive self-talk.
4. Community & Parental Involvement
 - A Family Literacy Night will be hosted at the school, where students showcase their progress and read to therapy animals.
 - Fuzzy Friends Rescue staff will provide lessons on animal care, responsibility, and empathy-building.

Project Timeline & Calendar

August	Teacher training on structured reading strategies & SEL integration
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September	Student recruitment, parental consent, pre-assessments
September - May	Twice to four times a month reading visits to Fuzzy Friends Rescue.
November	Mid-program check-in: Assess student progress
February	Parent/community volunteer event at the rescue center or campus
April	Post-assessments, student reflections, and evaluation of literacy growth
May	Family Literacy Night – Students present progress, celebrate success

School-Community Partners:

- Fuzzy Friends Rescue – Provides reading space and education on animal welfare.

Through these structured literacy experiences, *Reading to Rescues* will create lasting academic and personal growth for students while positively impacting the rescue animals and the broader community.

Communication and Dissemination:

To ensure transparency and recognition of the Waco Education Foundation's support, *Reading to Rescues: Literacy Meets Compassion* will incorporate several communication and dissemination strategies, including:

1. Foundation Involvement & Recognition:
 - The Foundation will receive invitations to observe scheduled reading sessions at Fuzzy Friends Rescue.
 - We will coordinate photo opportunities showcasing student engagement and literacy growth, ensuring proper permissions are obtained.
 - The Foundation will be recognized on all promotional materials, including newsletters, social media posts, and school communications.
2. Publicity & Outreach:
 - We will collaborate with WISD-TV to highlight the program's impact through student testimonials and video features.
 - Articles and success stories will be submitted to Waco ISD newsletters, local newspapers, and educational blogs to share program milestones.

- A dedicated webpage on the school's website will provide updates, student progress highlights, and upcoming events.
- 3. District-Wide Dissemination:
 - Program results and best practices will be presented at district-wide staff development sessions to encourage replication in other Waco ISD schools.
 - We will share data and student progress at Waco ISD literacy meetings to showcase the benefits of non-traditional literacy interventions.
 - A final program report, including student success stories, reading improvements, and SEL impacts, will be submitted to Waco ISD leadership and the Foundation.
- 4. Willingness to Present & Share Results:
 - We are open to presenting program outcomes at Foundation meetings, Board of Education sessions, and community literacy events.
 - Educators involved will create a training toolkit outlining the program model, reading strategies, and SEL components, which can be shared with other campuses.

By implementing these strategies, we will amplify the impact of *Reading to Rescues* while ensuring the Waco Education Foundation's vital role is highlighted throughout the program.

Evaluation:

The success of *Reading to Rescues: Literacy Meets Compassion* will be measured using both qualitative and quantitative data to assess its impact on students' literacy skills, emotional growth, and engagement.

1. Literacy Growth

- Assessment Data: Students' reading levels will be tracked using pre- and post-program reading assessments (e.g., fluency checks, pre/post-program assessments).
- Teacher Observations: Teachers will document improvements in reading confidence, fluency, and willingness to read aloud.
- Student Reflections: Students will complete reading logs to track the number of books read, reading progress, and personal reflections on their experience.

2. Social-Emotional Impact

- Behavioral Observations: Educators will monitor changes in students' self-confidence, emotional regulation, and engagement during reading sessions and in the classroom.
- Student Self-Assessments: Students will complete self-reflection surveys on how the program has influenced their confidence, emotional well-being, and empathy toward animals.
- Rescue Staff Feedback: Staff at Fuzzy Friends Rescue will provide input on students' interactions with the animals and any noticeable behavior changes, plus any adoptions that take place of the animals that are read to.

3. Community Engagement & Program Growth

- Attendance & Participation Rates: The number of students participating in the reading sessions will be tracked to ensure consistent engagement.
- Parental & Community Feedback: Parents, teachers, and rescue staff will complete surveys to evaluate the program's effectiveness and impact.
- Success Stories & Testimonials: Student testimonials and rescue center feedback will be compiled into a program impact report to share with stakeholders.-

4. Dissemination of Results

- Data and success stories will be shared with Waco ISD, the Waco Education Foundation, and local media to highlight program outcomes.
- Results will be presented in staff development sessions to explore expanding the initiative across other campuses.

Through these measurement strategies, we will ensure that *Reading to Rescues* achieves its goals of improving literacy, fostering emotional well-being, and strengthening community partnerships.

Long term implementation:

The *Reading to Rescues: Literacy Meets Compassion* program is designed to have a lasting impact on students, the school community, and the rescue animals involved. To ensure its sustainability beyond the 2025-2026 school year, we have outlined the following plans:

1. Securing Ongoing Funding

- We will seek additional grants, corporate sponsorships, and community partnerships to cover transportation costs and materials.
- Local businesses and Waco Education Foundation will be approached for continued support.
- Fundraising events (e.g., book drives, literacy nights, and community donations) will help maintain program costs.

2. Expanding School & District Involvement

- The program will be integrated into the district's literacy intervention strategies, allowing more schools to participate.
- Teachers and staff will receive training to expand implementation across multiple campuses.
- Collaboration with the district's SEL (Social-Emotional Learning) initiatives will ensure continued alignment with student development goals.

3. Strengthening Community Partnerships

- A long-term partnership agreement with Fuzzy Friends Rescue will solidify yearly student visits and reading opportunities.
- We will engage local libraries and literacy organizations to expand reading resources and student engagement.
- Parent and volunteer involvement will increase through family reading days and mentorship programs.

4. Measuring Long-Term Impact

- We will continue tracking student literacy growth, emotional well-being, and engagement to assess long-term success.
- Graduates of the program will be invited to serve as peer mentors, fostering a cycle of literacy and leadership.
- Success stories will be shared with district administrators, Waco Foundation, and local media to encourage further adoption.

Key personnel:

Person A – Project Coordinator

With over 30 years of teaching experience spanning pre-school to college, in both special and general education, Person A brings a wealth of expertise to *Reading to Rescues: Literacy Meets Compassion*. Holding dual state credentials in Texas (ELAR 6-8, Special Education EC-12, STR and ESL) and California (Multiple Subject Teaching Credential, Specialist Instruction Credential in Special Education, Resource Specialist Added Authorization, Administrative Services Clear Credential, and Autism Spectrum Disorders Added Authorization) as well as two master's degrees—one in Human Development and the other in Education with an emphasis in Administration. As a former administrator of a credit recovery and discipline program, Person A possesses strong program management skills and a deep understanding of student behavioral and academic needs. Their extensive background in multiple disciplines allows for tailored literacy interventions, ensuring that struggling readers receive the support they need. In addition to their classroom experience, Person A has successfully written and received multiple education grants, demonstrating the ability to secure funding and sustain long-term projects. Person A will coordinate with person B the scheduling of student groups and coordinate teacher participation, ensuring seamless collaboration with Fuzzy Friends Rescue. They will conduct pre- and post-assessments to measure student growth in literacy and emotional regulation while maintaining running records to track progress over time. By aligning the program with district literacy and social-emotional learning goals, Person A will ensure meaningful and measurable outcomes. Beyond the classroom, Person A has a long-standing commitment to animal welfare as a volunteer at a local animal shelter as a dog walker, fundraiser, orientation coordinator and liaison for group tours. This experience plus owning their own rescue dogs enhances the ability to bridge literacy development with compassion, creating a unique and impactful program. Their role will also include managing communication with Fuzzy Friends Rescue, handling grant reporting and budgeting, and with person B seeking additional funding to ensure the sustainability of *Reading to Rescues*. With a passion for education and community engagement, Person A is dedicated to fostering both academic growth and emotional well-being in students through this innovative program.

Person B – Project Advisor/ Faculty Member

Person B will serve as a program advisor and teaching faculty member for the Reading to Rescue initiative. With 18 years of experience in education, Person B brings a wealth of knowledge and expertise from both special education and general education settings. Holding multiple teaching credentials in California, including a Multiple Subject Credential, Education Specialist Credential, and Administrative Credential, Person B is well-equipped to support diverse student needs. Additionally, Person B holds teaching credentials in Texas for EC-6 and 4-8 Core Subjects with STR, along with specialized training in the Science of Teaching Reading. Their deep understanding of literacy development, coupled with their experience as a reading specialist, makes them an invaluable asset to our program. Person B holds an Ed.D. in Educational Leadership with a specialization in Special Education, a degree that reflects their commitment to advancing educational practices for diverse learners. Throughout their doctoral studies, Person B focused on promoting inclusive education and enhancing support systems for students with special needs. Person B is dedicated to fostering reading success and ensuring that every student receives the support they need to thrive academically. Additionally, Person B has a profound passion for animals and has previously dedicated time to volunteering with a wildlife rescue organization. Through this volunteer opportunity, Person B has gained hands-on experience caring for a variety of rescued animals, including rehabilitating injured wildlife and helping prepare them for release back into their natural habitats. Beyond their volunteer work, Person B has also raised numerous animals, from

household pets to farm animals, fostering a deep understanding of animal care, behavior, and well-being. Their compassion and commitment to animals extend to educating others about wildlife conservation and the importance of humane treatment for all living creatures.

Budget and budget narrative and justification:

The requested funds will be instrumental in ensuring the success of *Reading to Rescues: Literacy Meets Compassion* by supporting transportation, instructional materials, and necessary supplies.

Transportation:

A significant portion of the budget will be dedicated to transportation, allowing different groups of students to travel to and from Fuzzy Friends Rescue two to three times a month. Each session, lasting approximately two hours, will provide students with ample time to read to the animals in a calm, nonjudgmental environment before returning to campus. Covering transportation costs ensures that all students, including those in specialized programs, have equitable access to this opportunity, removing potential barriers that might otherwise limit participation.

Books:

To further enhance literacy growth and engagement, funds will also be allocated for the purchase of books through *Books First*, an approved vendor. In collaboration with the school librarian, books will be carefully selected to align with students' reading levels and interests, ensuring that each student has access to appropriate and engaging materials that support their development.

Organizational and Instructional Supplies:

Funds will also be used to purchase essential materials to support student engagement and program organization, including:

- **Two-gallon freezer bags** to hold books for each student.
- **Colored masking tape** to label and identify student book bags.
- **File folders and crates** to keep student materials organized and track progress.
- **Writing supplies and name tags** to facilitate student engagement and participation.
- **Cushions for seating** to ensure students are comfortable while reading at the shelter.

These materials, sourced through *Office Depot and HEB*, will assist in organizing student participation, tracking progress, and facilitating reflective writing activities that reinforce reading comprehension and emotional regulation.

Waco Education Foundation

Grant Budget Form

Assigned Proposal #	60
Project Title:	Reading to Rescues: Literacy Meets Compassion
Number of Students Served by Grant:	200

Qty	Budget Item	Verify Vendor (Y or N)	\$ Requested from the WISD Foundation	Other Secured Source	\$ from Other Source (if applicable)	Total Amount
Consumable Supplies						
2	Case copy paper	Y	\$ 57.98			\$ 57.98
3	Boxes Pencils	Y	\$ 17.07			\$17.07
7	Certificates (box of 25)	Y	\$ 111.93			\$111.93
1	Shimmer Paper (1 box Of 100)	Y	\$ 50.00			\$ 50.00
						\$ -
total Consumable Supplies			\$ 236.98		\$ -	\$ 236.98
Technology						
						\$ -
						\$ -
total Technology			\$ -		\$ -	\$ -
Long-Term Supplies / Equipment (items that will last beyond the grant year)						
6	packs of 36 -Binder Pocket Folders	Y	\$ 99.50			\$ 99.50
4	File folders (box of 30)		\$ 48.00			\$ 48.00
2	6 pack stackable crates	Y	\$ 106.00			\$ 106.00
2	Blue Paw Print book markers (75 count per box)	Y	\$ 59.90			\$ 59.90

2	Box of (15 inch) Cushions	Y	\$ 138.98			\$ 138.98
3	SureHook Reinforced Hanging Box File (box of 30)	Y	\$ 169.00			\$ 169.00
	Books	Y	\$ 1,700.00			\$ 1,700.00
total Long-Term Supplies			\$ 2,321.38		\$ -	\$ 2,321.38
Contracted Services						
						\$ -
						\$ -
total Contracted Services			\$ -		\$ -	\$ -
Personnel						
						\$ -
						\$ -
total Personnel			\$ -		\$ -	\$ -
Travel / Other						
	District Bus (42.5 hours@ \$50 per half hour)	Y	\$ 4,250.00			\$ 4,250.00
						\$ -
						\$ -
						\$ -
total Other			\$ 4,250.00		\$ -	\$ 4,250.00
Totals		Total Requested from the WISD Foundation		Foundation Cost Per Student	Total from Other Sources	Total Cost of Project
		\$ 6,808.36		34.0418	\$ -	\$ 6,808.36