



**WACO ISD EDUCATION FOUNDATION
COVER SHEET – PART II
Application for Grant:
2026-2027 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 | Extended Education for Staff |
| Enhanced Programming for Advanced Students | Emphasis on Student Performance |
| Fine Arts | STEM |
| Literacy | Enrichment |

#21 – STRIKING A BALANCE: A STAFF WELLNESS INITIATIVE

1. Project Description

"Striking a Balance" addresses the critical need for educator wellness and retention by establishing a structured, district-wide bowling league across our elementary campuses. In an era where teacher burnout is a significant challenge, this initiative provides a necessary "third space"—distinct from home and the classroom—where staff can decompress, build camaraderie, and foster positive mental health. By covering lineage fees and equipment costs, we remove the financial barriers to participation, creating an inclusive, monthly touchpoint that encourages social connection among staff members who might otherwise remain isolated within their individual buildings. Beyond immediate stress relief, this project serves as a strategic tool for cross-campus collaboration and culture building. By bringing together diverse staff—teachers, principals, paraprofessionals, custodians—in a neutral, recreational setting, we aim to break down silos and strengthen the professional support network across the district. The league will utilize a handicap system to ensure equity regardless of athletic skill, reinforcing the message that our primary goal is connection rather than competition. Ultimately, investing in the well-being and morale of our educators is a direct investment in the stability and positivity of the learning environments they create for our students.

2. Rationale

In the modern educational environment, elementary schools often function as "islands." While digital connectivity has increased, authentic social connection has plummeted. This isolation leads to a measurable decrease in "social capital"—the collective value of social networks and the inclinations that arise from these networks to do things for each other. When school leaders and staff only interact during high-stakes meetings or crisis management, the foundation of trust necessary for a high-performing district begins to erode.

To combat this, we must intentionally rebuild the "third spaces" where staff can interact as peers rather than just colleagues. We aim to do this with bowling because it is a "lifetime sport" that is radically inclusive, regardless of age, athletic ability, or prior experience.

As Robert Putnam observes in his seminal work, *Bowling Alone*:

"Social capital makes us smarter, healthier, safer, richer, and better able to govern a just and stable democracy."

By establishing a 12-school round-robin league, we are moving from "bowling alone" to "bowling together." This initiative isn't merely about recreation; it is a strategic effort to cultivate bridging social capital—the ties that connect our 12 unique campuses into one cohesive district unit. By funding this project through a grant, any member of a school staff can participate, removing financial insecurity as a barrier to participation.

3. Goals

Goal 1: Strengthening Peer Support & Networking

By the conclusion of the 11-month league season, the project will have facilitated 66 unique cross-campus interactions, ensuring that 100% of the participating elementary schools have established a direct social connection with every other school in the district to foster a collaborative professional culture.

Goal 2: Mitigating Educator Burnout

To promote staff wellness and retention, the league will provide a monthly "Third Space" environment for at least 48 district employees (4 per school) each month, with the target of a 20% increase in self-reported "job satisfaction" and "peer support" as measured by a standardized pre- and post-season wellness survey.

Goal 3: Building "Bridging" Social Capital

Leveraging the principles of Robert Putnam’s *Bowling Alone*, the league aims to transition staff from professional silos to a unified network. Our goal is that by Month 11, 85% of participants will report having a "high level of comfort" contacting a peer at a different campus for professional advice or resource sharing, compared to the baseline established at the start of the year.

Goal 4: Promoting District-Wide Equity and Inclusion

To ensure inclusive participation, the league will utilize a 100% handicap scoring system, maintaining a participation rate where at least 50% of the bowlers represent non-athletic or "novice" skill levels, thereby ensuring the league remains a social—rather than an elite—athletic endeavor.

4. Plan of Operation

If funded, this project will start in May with each campus identifying roles as well as completing the first challenge: deciding on a team name. When a staff chooses their own identity (e.g., *The Alcott Alley-Gators* or *The Lincoln Lanes*), they take immediate "psychological ownership" of the program. In June, there will be a "practice" session, where four bowlers from each team can come practice, but no points will be awarded. The kick off will be in July (just before school starts). From there, competition will occur monthly in a round-robin format below.

Month	Lane 1-2	Lane 3-4	Lane 5-6	Lane 7-8	Lane 9-10	Lane 11-12
July	S12 vs S1	S11 vs S2	S10 vs S3	S9 vs S4	S8 vs S5	S7 vs S6
August	S12 vs S2	S1 vs S3	S11 vs S4	S10 vs S5	S9 vs S6	S8 vs S7
September	S12 vs S3	S2 vs S4	S1 vs S5	S11 vs S6	S10 vs S7	S9 vs S8
October	S12 vs S4	S3 vs S5	S2 vs S6	S1 vs S7	S11 vs S8	S10 vs S9
November	S12 vs S5	S4 vs S6	S3 vs S7	S2 vs S8	S1 vs S9	S11 vs S10
December	S12 vs S6	S5 vs S7	S4 vs S8	S3 vs S9	S2 vs S10	S1 vs S11
January	S12 vs S7	S6 vs S8	S5 vs S9	S4 vs S10	S3 vs S11	S2 vs S1
February	S12 vs S8	S7 vs S9	S6 vs S10	S5 vs S11	S4 vs S1	S3 vs S2
March	S12 vs S9	S8 vs S10	S7 vs S11	S6 vs S1	S5 vs S2	S4 vs S3
April	S12 vs S10	S9 vs S11	S8 vs S1	S7 vs S2	S6 vs S3	S5 vs S4
May	S12 vs S11	S10 vs S1	S9 vs S2	S8 vs S3	S7 vs S4	S6 vs S5

Throughout play, there will also be awards given. The Golden Pin Trophy will be awarded to the winning school each month and then will travel from month to month throughout the year. The "Striking Improvement" Award will be given to the school who shows the greatest improvement in scores from July to May. Additionally, each month we will award the "Robert Putman Community Builder Award" to the campus that displays "bridging social capital" by mingling the most with their opponents. We will also award the Gutter Ball

Graciousness Award to the team with maybe the lowest score, but the highest spirits as shown by laughter and celebration dances.

5. Communication and Dissemination

As this project involves the entire district, there will be many opportunities to share the excitement. Each month, a district-wide email/newsletter will highlight the award winners, featuring photos of the teams in action! If possible, and with the help of the communications department, a dedicated page on the district website will host the rotating schedule, scores, team names, and a gallery of photos. We will use a dedicated district hashtag. On league nights, one school will "take over" the district's Facebook stories to show the camaraderie behind the scenes. Additionally, as the dates will be made public at the start of the project, members of the district office, Education Foundation, or school board will be welcome to attend any night and cheer on the staff. As part of the evaluation, pre/post and monthly survey data will be collected and used. The data and experiences will be gathered by the project sponsor and disseminated to other districts or entities that want to follow the model.

6. Evaluation

There will be three different surveys conducted throughout to provide evaluative data.

Firstly, we will conduct a Pre-Season Baseline Questionnaire to establish the current level of isolation/connection.

Scale: 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree)

I feel a strong sense of connection to the district-wide community beyond my own school building.

I can name at least three staff members at every other elementary school in this district.

If I had a professional problem, I would feel comfortable reaching out to a peer at another campus whom I do not currently know well.

I feel that my "work-life balance" and "mental wellness" are currently supported by district-level initiatives.

Short Answer: How many people outside of your current school building would you consider "professional friends"? (Numerical answer)

Then, we'll conduct a Monthly "Pulse" (The 5-Question Survey) to monitor progress.

Scale: 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree)

Connection: Tonight, I had a meaningful conversation with a staff member from the opposing school.

Morale: Participating in tonight's league increased my positive feelings toward my job this week.

Network: I learned something new about a different campus or a peer's role tonight.

Wellness: I feel more "recharged" and less professionally isolated after tonight's session.

The Putnam Metric: I now feel more comfortable collaborating with the team I played against tonight.

Lastly, we'll conduct a Post-Season Impact Questionnaire to see if this project met its goals.

Scale: 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree)

I feel significantly more connected to the district as a whole than I did 11 months ago.

My "professional network" within the district has grown as a direct result of the bowling league.

I have reached out to a peer at another school for advice or collaboration because of a connection made at the lanes.

I believe this league has improved the overall "culture" and "trust" across the 12 elementary schools.

Short Answer: What was the most valuable "non-bowling" connection you made this year?

7. Long Term Implications

The primary long-term impact is a reduction in staff turnover. Educators who feel socially connected to their peers are statistically less likely to leave their positions. By building "Relational Wealth," Waco ISD becomes not just a workplace, but a community. This league creates a "sticky" culture that keeps high-quality staff within the district, saving the thousands of dollars typically spent on recruiting and training new hires. It also provides a blueprint for how 12 separate elementary campuses can function as one cohesive unit. This framework creates a repeatable model for cross-district collaboration. Long-term, the trust built at the bowling alley will translate into more effective Grade Level Meetings, shared Professional Development (PD) resources, and a "we're all in this together" mindset during state testing or district transitions. Once the initial equipment (traveling trophy, etc) and the scheduling framework are established, the league becomes a self-sustaining tradition. Future years can be funded through small team registration fees or local business sponsorships, ensuring that the social capital built this year continues to appreciate over the next decade.

8. Key Personnel

The grant-writer will serve as the "League Commissioner" ensuring the budget is kept, managing the master schedule, tracking the monthly scores/handicaps, and maintaining the "Digital Scoreboard." Each campus will determine a Campus Ambassador. That person will ensure the team has 4 participants each month, will lead the naming challenge, and will ensure photos from the evening are sent to the League Commissioner. Lastly, there will be a spirit committee, made up of 3 volunteers from across all campuses. This committee will determine winners of the Gutter Ball Graciousness and Community Builder awards as well as ensure the Golden Pin travels to the correct school each month.

9. Budget Narrative

The funds requested in this grant will pay for the bowling league. By funding it in this manner, any member of the staff can participate regardless of financial security. The grant funds will cover the cost of four bowlers per campus each month (48 bowlers at \$15 a night is \$720 a night). There will be eleven nights of competition plus one practice, so twelve nights in total bringing the lane/shoe rental price to \$8640 total. Each school will receive a personalized pin to keep at their lane while competing (\$30 each for \$360). The last \$1,000 will be for prizes and awards such as the Golden Pin, Gutter Ball Graciousness, and Community Builder each month.

Waco Education Foundation

Grant Budget Form

Assigned Proposal #	21
Project Title:	Striking a Balance: A Staff Wellness Initiative
Number of Students Served by Grant:	

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						
	Trophies and Awards	Y	\$ 970.00			\$ 970.00
						\$ -
						\$ -
						\$ -
						\$ -
						\$ -
						\$ -
						\$ -
	total Consumable Supplies		\$ 970.00		\$ -	\$ 970.00

Technology						
						\$ -
						\$ -
	total Technology		\$ -		\$ -	\$ -

Long-Term Supplies / Equipment (items that will last beyond the grant year)						
						\$ -
						\$ -
						\$ -
						\$ -
						\$ -
						\$ -
						\$ -
	total Long-Term Supplies		\$ -		\$ -	\$ -

Contracted Services						
576	Lane/Shoe Fees for bowlers	Y	\$ 8,640.00			\$ 8,640.00
13	Personalized Pins and Golden Pin	Y	\$ 390.00			\$ 390.00
	total Contracted Services		\$ 9,030.00		\$ -	\$ 9,030.00

Personnel						
						\$ -
						\$ -
	total Personnel		\$ -		\$ -	\$ -

Travel / Other						
						\$ -
						\$ -
						\$ -
						\$ -
	total Other		\$ -		\$ -	\$ -

Totals		Total Requested from the WISD Foundation	Foundation Cost Per Student	Total from Other Sources	Total Cost of Project
		\$ 10,000.00	#DIV/0!	\$ -	\$ 10,000.00