



**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

Enhanced Programming for Advanced Students

Fine Arts

Literacy

Extended Education for Staff

Emphasis on Student Performance

STEM

Enrichment

Project Title: The Power of I³ ~ Inquiry, Innovation, and Impact

Assigned Proposal Number: 74

Project Description:

Imagine a classroom that operates more like a think tank than a traditional classroom. Students investigate real-world problems by reading credible sources, documenting ideas in journals, collaborating with peers, and designing thoughtful solutions. This grant will establish a dynamic learning library and research hub focused on Humanities, STEAM, leadership, and inquiry-based learning. Students will explore issues such as environmental sustainability, human rights, and global innovation through nonfiction texts, professional journals, and paired fiction literature. Resources will also support students conducting research for science and history fairs. Through inquiry, collaboration, and reflection, students will develop the critical skills needed to become thoughtful changemakers.

1. Rationale:

Imagine a classroom where curiosity drives learning and knowledge becomes a tool for solving meaningful problems. In this environment, students expand their understanding of complex issues and apply what they learn through research, collaboration, and thoughtful problem solving.

This grant proposal aligns strongly with the Waco Education Foundation's focus areas of Enhanced Programming for Advanced Students and Emphasis on Student Performance by providing intellectually challenging opportunities that encourage gifted and high-performing students to engage in rigorous inquiry and meaningful application of knowledge.

Today, middle school students have limited access to a curated classroom research library that supports inquiry-based investigation across multiple disciplines. While school libraries supply resources, they are often not aligned with the units of study in this research classroom. Students need to be able to access information quickly and to have at hand when needed for support. Many research activities rely primarily on digital searches, which can limit students' exposure to high-quality nonfiction texts, professional journals, and interdisciplinary materials. This grant will provide a dedicated set of resources that allows students to engage in deeper research, develop stronger source evaluation skills, and participate in extended inquiry projects aligned with district goals for advanced learners and college-ready literacy.

The grant will support a program that integrates key focus areas including STEAM, Literacy Enrichment, and Fine Arts. Students will investigate real-world issues such as environmental sustainability, human rights, and innovation using high-quality nonfiction texts and professional journals, strengthening research literacy and critical thinking. Paired fiction literature will deepen comprehension and empathy while supporting advanced literacy development. Students will also use field journals to sketch ideas, plan solutions, and visualize concepts, integrating elements of creativity and design that reflect the practices of artists, engineers, scientists, and historians. While it does not directly address the area of Fine Arts, it adds the element of creative arts in STEM learning elevating it to STEAM learning with the production of models, prototypes, presentations, and visual art.

Middle school is a pivotal stage in which advanced learners benefit from opportunities that move beyond traditional assignments toward authentic inquiry and creative problem solving. For gifted students in particular, meaningful challenges and real-world connections are essential to sustaining high levels of engagement and performance.

This grant provides support for a learning environment where students are not only challenged academically but also encouraged to apply their growing knowledge in ways that are relevant to their interests and the world around them. Through research, collaboration, and innovation, students will develop the skills necessary to maintain high levels of academic performance while exploring solutions to problems that matter to them and their communities.

The grant is designed to support advanced learners by providing depth, complexity, and independence in learning. Students will engage in extended research, interdisciplinary inquiry, and creative problem solving that mirror the work of professionals in STEM, humanities, and civic leadership. By exploring complex topics, managing long-term investigations, and presenting ideas to authentic audiences, students will continue developing the intellectual habits, persistence, and curiosity necessary to sustain high levels of performance both in school and beyond.

2. Goals:

Imagine a classroom where students develop the skills to manage complex investigations, analyze credible information, and communicate ideas with clarity and purpose. This project seeks to cultivate students who can function as researchers, project managers, collaborators, designers, and presenters while exploring meaningful questions about their communities and the world. Our projected goal is that 85% of students who participate in these learning experiences will demonstrate growth in research skills as measured by the rubric designed for the five inquiry cycles. The goal to increase students who participate in history and science fairs should also increase due to the confidence students will gain from improvement in research and presentation skills.

Specific goals include:

- Strengthening research literacy through the evaluation and synthesis of credible sources aligned with 6th and 7th grade Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) for reading, writing, and research. Students will identify reliable information, compare perspectives, and document evidence in ways that support inquiry-based investigations, including projects developed for Science Fair and History Fair competitions.
- Increasing engagement with literacy through the pairing of nonfiction research materials with narrative literature connected to the same themes. This supports TEKS expectations for reading comprehension, analysis of informational texts, and interpretation of literary works while encouraging students to explore complex issues through multiple perspectives.
- Developing critical thinking and evidence-based reasoning as students analyze data, evaluate historical and scientific evidence, and construct arguments supported by credible research.

These skills align with TEKS expectations for inquiry, analysis, and communication across disciplines.

- Encouraging innovation through design thinking and creative problem solving by engaging students in STEAM-based inquiry. Students will investigate real-world challenges and develop potential solutions using research, experimentation, modeling, and design.
- Building collaboration, leadership, and project management skills as students work in teams to organize research, manage long-term investigations, and contribute to shared goals.
- Strengthening presentation and communication skills as students learn to clearly explain research findings and proposed solutions through multiple formats, including oral presentations, written reports, visual displays, and digital presentations—mirroring the expectations of Science Fair and History Fair investigations.
- Encouraging multiple ways to represent learning, including the creation of models, diagrams, artistic representations, design prototypes, and visual storytelling. These approaches integrate Fine Arts and STEAM practices, allowing students to communicate complex ideas through creative and visual forms.
- Connecting classroom learning to college, career, and community pathways by engaging students in authentic inquiry experiences that mirror the work of scientists, historians, engineers, artists, and civic leaders.

Students will self-assess their own collaboration, leadership, and project management skills as a soft-skill development opportunity. These moments of self-reflection ~ How well did I learn? How was I a good collaborator? What did I need from other team members to do my best work? ~ will aid students in gaining preparedness for high school and college as well as seeing themselves not only as learners, but as thinkers capable of contributing meaningful ideas to their communities and the world.

By emphasizing depth, complexity, and student-driven inquiry aligned with gifted and talented instructional frameworks, this project ensures that advanced learners remain challenged, continue performing at high levels, and maintain the intellectual momentum necessary to pursue excellence in future academic and professional endeavors.

3. Plan of Operation:

Imagine a classroom where students lead the work of planning and managing complex investigations—developing schedules, organizing responsibilities, and maintaining the accuracy and efficiency required to move projects from research to presentation.

These inquiry cycles will be supported by the classroom research library and mobile resource hub described above, providing students with access to nonfiction research texts, literature pairings, and field journals that help organize and document their investigations.

Students will work in collaborative teams and assume roles such as researcher, project manager, designer, and presenter. Each learning experience will involve research, analysis of credible sources, design thinking, and multiple methods of representing learning including written reports, models, visual displays, artistic representations, and digital presentations aligned with 6th and 7th grade TEKS and supporting investigations for Science Fair and History Fair competitions.

A key component of the project is collaboration with community professionals, mentors, and advisors who may provide consultation, expertise, and critique of student work when available. These professionals may represent fields connected to student research topics such as environmental science, engineering, history, public policy, and community leadership.

At the conclusion of each learning experience, students will present their research findings and proposed solutions. Parents, community members, mentors, and stakeholders—including representatives of the Waco Education Foundation—will be invited to attend presentations and research showcases throughout the year. When appropriate, campus communications or local media may also be invited to observe and highlight student

Project Timeline:

August 12 – August 25

Foundational Building Phase

Students will establish classroom norms and expectations for collaboration, inquiry, and leadership. Teams will be formed and students will explore roles such as project manager, researcher, designer, and presenter. Students will also be introduced to research practices, field journals, and the expectations of a student-driven learning environment.

Parents will receive information about the project goals and opportunities to participate in student presentations throughout the year.

- **August 26 – October 2**

First Inquiry Learning Experience

Students begin their first research cycle by investigating a real-world problem, analyzing sources, and developing potential solutions.

Presentations: October 5 – October 9

Families and community members will be invited to observe presentations.

- **October 19 – November 20**

Second Inquiry Learning Experience

Students deepen research skills and apply design-thinking strategies to propose solutions to complex challenges.

Presentations: November 30 – December 4

Students present findings to peers and invited guests.

- **December 7 – December 17**

International Human Rights Month Initiative

Students investigate global and local human rights issues through interdisciplinary research connecting humanities, history, and civic responsibility.

Parents and community members may be invited to attend discussions or presentations related to this initiative.

- **January 5 – February 5**

Third Inquiry Learning Experience

Students conduct extended research and begin developing independent research ideas that may evolve into **Science Fair and History Fair projects**.

Presentations: February 10 – February 12

- **February 15 – March 26**

Fourth Inquiry Learning Experience

Students refine research investigations and continue developing projects for **Science Fair and History Fair competitions**. Mentoring and research feedback will occur during this period.

Presentations: March 29 – April 2

- **April 5 – May 27**

5th and Culminating Inquiry Experience

Students apply the skills developed throughout the year to investigate complex challenges affecting their communities and other communities facing similar issues.

This extended timeframe allows for adjustments related to STAAR testing and other end-of-year campus activities.

Students will develop comprehensive research proposals, models, or presentations outlining potential solutions.

All dates are **tentative and will be adjusted as necessary** to align with district and campus calendars, STAAR testing schedules, and the availability of professional advisors who may participate in student presentations or consultations.

4. Communication and Dissemination:

This classroom maintains a long-standing open-door philosophy, welcoming mentors, community professionals, parents, district leaders, and representatives of the Waco Education Foundation to observe and participate in student learning. Foundation representatives will be invited throughout the year to attend student presentations, research showcases, and culminating events. These gatherings will provide opportunities for observation, photography, and recognition of the Foundation's support in creating authentic learning experiences for students.

Student presentations at the conclusion of each learning cycle will serve as opportunities to highlight the impact of the grant. When appropriate, these events may be shared through campus and district communication channels, including WISD-TV, newsletters, and social media, helping to celebrate student work and the Foundation's role in supporting innovative learning.

Results and instructional strategies from the project will also be shared with colleagues across the district through professional collaboration, staff development conversations, and informal learning visits, allowing other educators to observe how inquiry-based learning, research, and design thinking can be implemented in middle school classrooms.

Because this classroom welcomes observers and collaborators, it can serve as a conduit for shared learning across the district, demonstrating how rigorous inquiry experiences can inspire strong student engagement and academic performance. The presence of mentors, families, and community professionals allows students to see that the community is invested in their futures while also helping the community better understand how to support schools.

By opening the classroom to collaboration and shared learning, this project encourages a culture of transparency, accountability, and empowerment, where students recognize that their ideas matter and that their work contributes to meaningful conversations about the future of their communities.

Imagine a classroom where students see their ideas valued by teachers, families, professionals, and community leaders—and where the support of the Waco Education Foundation helps make that vision possible.

5. Evaluation:

Imagine a classroom where growth is measured not only by what students know, but by what they can do with that knowledge. Student progress will be evaluated through a structured rubric that measures development as researchers, project managers, collaborators, and presenters, while aligning with 6th and 7th grade Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) for reading, writing, research, inquiry, and communication. (See section on Goals)

The rubric will evaluate several key skill areas:

- **Research Literacy** – locating, evaluating, and synthesizing credible sources in alignment with TEKS expectations for informational text analysis and research.
- **Critical Thinking and Evidence-Based Reasoning** – analyzing scientific and historical evidence, drawing conclusions, and supporting claims with data or documented sources.
- **Project Management and Organization** – developing timelines, managing responsibilities, maintaining accuracy in documentation, and completing project milestones.
- **Collaboration and Leadership** – contributing productively to group work, demonstrating leadership when appropriate, and fulfilling agreed-upon responsibilities.
- **Communication and Presentation** – clearly explaining research findings and proposed solutions through oral presentations, written reports, visual displays, models, artistic representations, and digital media aligned with STEAM and Fine Arts integration.

At the beginning of each inquiry cycle, students will establish group contracts outlining roles, responsibilities, and expectations for individual accountability within collaborative teams. These contracts will help ensure that each student contributes meaningfully to the research process and project outcomes.

Student progress will be evaluated at several points during each learning experience through scheduled checkpoints, including research progress reviews, project planning updates, and preliminary presentations. These checkpoints will provide opportunities for feedback and will include graded progress assessments that guide students in refining their work.

The rubric will be used at three key stages:

- **Beginning of the Year** – establishing a baseline measure of students’ research, collaboration, and presentation skills.
- **Throughout the Year** – monitoring student progress during inquiry cycles through checkpoint evaluations and formative assessments.
- **Culminating Project** – evaluating students’ ability to apply their skills in a comprehensive research investigation and presentation of solutions to real-world challenges affecting their communities and other communities facing similar issues.

Whenever possible, students will share their proposals with community partners, mentors, or professional advisors, receiving authentic feedback that helps refine their thinking and improve their work. Even when solutions are not implemented, the critique students receive will help them understand how ideas evolve through discussion, evidence, and collaboration.

The skills developed through this process—research literacy, critical thinking, project management, collaboration, and effective communication—support student success across all subject areas, helping students apply these habits of inquiry and organization in their other academic courses.

Over the course of the year, rubric data and student work will demonstrate measurable growth in research, leadership, and communication skills, providing evidence that students have developed the ability to manage complex investigations and communicate meaningful solutions.

6. Long-Term Implications:

The resources purchased through this grant will establish a sustainable classroom research library that can serve future students for years. In addition, exemplary student projects and selected field journal entries will be retained as instructional resources, allowing future students to study models of effective research, reflection, planning, and presentation. These exemplars will help build a lasting culture of inquiry while providing inspiration and clear expectations for future learners.

The instructional model created through this project—combining nonfiction research, literature, and design thinking—will continue to shape classroom culture beyond the 2026–2027 school year. By introducing students to inquiry-based problem solving in middle school, the project encourages them to pursue future pathways in science, engineering, humanities, and public leadership.

The foundational skills students gain through this work—research literacy, critical thinking, collaboration, project management, and communication—will strengthen their success across subject areas and continue to benefit them through high school, college, and career. Just as importantly, these experiences build confidence, agency, and purpose, empowering students to see themselves as capable contributors to their schools, communities, and the wider world.

Imagine a classroom where the work of one group of students becomes the foundation for the next, and where growing knowledge, confidence, and agency continue to shape learners long after they leave the classroom.

7. Key Personnel:

The lead teacher will be responsible for the design, coordination, and facilitation of the grant and resources. She has been recognized as a member of a global innovation team and has many years of implementing inquiry-based instruction. Responsibilities include selecting and organizing research materials for the classroom inquiry library, guiding students through inquiry cycles, facilitating collaborative investigations, and supporting students as they develop research questions, analyze credible sources, and present research-based solutions.

The teacher's primary role will be that of facilitator and guide, helping students manage projects, conduct research, and develop leadership skills while maintaining high expectations for accuracy, organization, and thoughtful problem solving. The lead teacher will also coordinate student presentations, manage project timelines, and oversee evaluation using project rubrics and scheduled checkpoints that monitor student progress throughout the year.

The resources purchased through this grant - including nonfiction texts, fiction pairings, journals, and research materials - will be organized through a mobile classroom research library so they may also support other teachers facilitating inquiry-based learning experiences within the program.

Community Mentors and Professional Advisors (Consultative Role)

When available, community professionals and mentors may provide consultation, feedback, and critique of student research projects. These individuals may represent fields connected to student investigations such as environmental science, engineering, history, civic leadership, or public policy. Their participation provides students with authentic perspectives and helps connect classroom learning to real-world applications.

Imagine a classroom supported by educators, mentors, and community partners working together to help students develop the knowledge, confidence, and leadership skills needed to contribute meaningfully to their communities and their future careers.

8. Budget and Budget Narrative / Justification

Vendor: Amazon

(All materials selected from approved district vendors. Sales tax not included. Shipping included in total.)

Budget Summary:

Category	Quantity / Description	Cost
7. Field Notebooks	Journals for 5 inquiry cycles (research documentation, planning, reflection)	\$1,555.28
21. Mobile Two-Sided Rolling Library Cart	Shared research resource cart	\$279.00
22. Metal Book Shelves		
23. Classroom Novel Sets	4 class sets (35 copies each) @ \$13.29 per book	\$1,860.60
Bookshelves	2 classroom bookshelves @ \$119 each	\$238.00
24. Non-Fiction resource books	Resource books in areas of study	\$3300.00
25. Professional Journals & Educational Magazines	Current periodicals supporting student research and global awareness	\$900.00
40. Shipping	Estimated shipping for materials	\$300.00

Total Budget: \$8,433.28

Funding from the Waco Education Foundation will support the creation of a student-centered inquiry library and research hub designed to strengthen literacy, research, and critical thinking for advanced middle school learners.

Justification:

7. Field Notebooks (\$1,555.28)

Field journals will be used during five inquiry cycles throughout the year. Students will use these

notebooks to record research notes, sketch ideas, track project timelines, reflect on learning, and document problem-solving processes. This practice mirrors the authentic work of scientists, engineers, historians, and designers. The number of field notebooks is large because each only has 60 pages. Students will use one notebook per inquiry. Some of the field notebooks will be saved in the library to serve as exemplars for future students.

21. Mobile Two-Sided Rolling Library Cart (\$279.00)

The rolling library cart will allow research materials to be shared easily among teachers facilitating inquiry learning within the program. This mobility supports collaboration and ensures resources can be accessed by multiple student groups during research and project development.

22. Bookshelves (\$238.00)

Two classroom bookshelves will house the growing inquiry library and ensure that resources remain organized, accessible, and visible to students as they conduct research.

23. Classroom Novel Sets (\$1,860.60)

Four class sets of novels will allow students to engage with narrative literature connected to inquiry topics such as environmental sustainability, human rights, innovation, and civic responsibility. These texts will be paired with nonfiction research materials to deepen comprehension and support advanced literacy development.

24. Nonfiction Inquiry Library (\$3,300.00)

High-quality nonfiction texts will support student investigations into topics such as environmental sustainability, human rights, innovation, engineering challenges, and global issues. These resources will strengthen research literacy and support projects developed for Science Fair and History Fair competitions. The names of these resources are not available because the curriculum topics have not been finalized for the 2026-2027 school year.

25. Professional Journals and Educational Magazines (\$900.00)

Subscriptions and current publications such as *National Geographic*, *Science News for Students*, *Smithsonian Magazine*, and similar resources will provide students with up-to-date information and real-world perspectives on global challenges and innovations.

40. Shipping (\$300.00)

Estimated shipping costs for acquiring books, journals, and classroom resources through approved vendors.

Together, these resources will establish a sustainable classroom research library that supports inquiry-based learning experiences for current and future students while encouraging collaboration, research literacy, and thoughtful problem solving.

Imagine a classroom where students have access to the same kinds of resources used by researchers, historians, and innovators—empowering them to investigate real problems and design meaningful solutions.

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Waco Education Foundation

Grant Budget Form

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Project Title:	the Power of I ³ ~ Inquiry, Innovation, and Impa
Number of Students Served by Grant:	350 approx.

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						
###	1000 Field Notebooks	Y	\$1,555.28			\$1,555.28
						\$ -
						\$ -
						\$ -
						\$ -
						\$ -
total Consumable Supplies			\$ 1,555.28		\$ -	\$ 1,555.28
Technology						
						\$ -
						\$ -
total Technology			\$ -		\$ -	\$ -
Long-Term Supplies / Equipment (items that will last beyond the grant year)						
1	Rolling Book Cart	Y	\$279.00			\$ 279.00
2	Metal Book Shelves	Y	\$238.00			\$ 238.00
4	Classroom Novel Sets	Y	\$1,860.60			\$ 1,860.60
	Non-fiction resource books	Y	\$ 3,300.00			\$ 3,300.00
	Magazines and journals	Y	\$900			\$ 900.00
						\$ -
total Long-Term Supplies			\$ 6,577.60		\$ -	\$ 6,577.60
Contracted Services						
						\$ -
						\$ -
total Contracted Services			\$ -		\$ -	\$ -
Personnel						
						\$ -
						\$ -
total Personnel			\$ -		\$ -	\$ -
Travel / Other						
	Estimated shipping	Y	\$ 300.00			\$ 300.00
						\$ -
						\$ -
						\$ -
total Other			\$ 300.00		\$ -	\$ 300.00
Totals			Total Requested from the WISD Foundation	Foundation Cost Per Student	Total from Other Sources	Total Cost of Project
			\$ 8,432.88	\$24.10	\$ -	\$ 8,432.88