

Muskogee Bridges Out of Poverty

2026 Grant Process (FY25-26)

Muskogee Bridges Out of Poverty Inc

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LOI Form

Program/Project Information

Mission and Priorities*

Please explain specifically how this request meets the mission of the committee you're applying to.

Muskogee Bridges Out of Poverty directly aligns with the Health and Wellness Committee's mission by addressing the mental, social, and physical health impacts of generational poverty. Chronic financial instability is a leading driver of toxic stress, poor health outcomes, and long-term reliance on emergency and social services. By helping families achieve stability, Muskogee Bridges improves overall health and reduces community-level costs.

Participants who gain stable employment, transportation, and financial skills experience improved mental health, increased access to preventive care, and healthier outcomes for their children—interrupting cycles of generational poverty. The program also offers classes that directly support wellness, including Navigating Nutrition, Positive Parenting, Money Matters 101, Boundaries, ESL, and wraparound services such as dental and vision care and reliable transportation through a car donation program.

Number of Clients Served*

How many Muskogee citizens do you anticipate serving in the coming grant year? How many people were served by this program last year?

Each year, we directly serve **170 Muskogee residents** in the Getting Ahead and post-graduation Staying Ahead classes. **350 family members of the participants** benefit indirectly through improved household stability, reduced stress, and increased access to resources.

Up to 500 residents receive training in Bridges Out of Poverty workshops.

Over 5-years, this represents **3,350 served directly** and **1,750 served indirectly**, extending the program's impact across households and generations.

Population Served*

Please provide the demographic breakdown of who this request will serve. (This could include age, race, ethnicity, income eligibility criteria, etc.)

Muskogee's poverty rate is 24.9%, and participants in Getting Ahead are low-income adults residing in Muskogee who must be 18 and living at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level.

Muskogee Bridges does not discriminate based on gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, sex, or religion, and courses are offered in both English and Spanish to ensure equitable access.

Bridges training attendees are typically middle-income adults who play key roles in local systems and workplaces.

Dates of Service*

Provide the start and end dates of the program/project.

The five year program will begin July 1, 2026 and end June 30, 2030.

Big Picture*

Please describe your big picture vision and overall need for assistance.

After more than 15 years of building this community-wide initiative into a nationally recognized model, the continued success of Muskogee Bridges Out of Poverty depends on sustained funding to maintain and expand its proven impact. Our work goes beyond short-term assistance—we are transforming lives, strengthening families, and reshaping how our community understands and responds to poverty.

Muskogee Bridges equips families to move out of survival mode and into stability by addressing the root causes of generational poverty. At the same time, we educate businesses, agencies, faith communities, and policymakers on the complex realities of poverty so that local systems and policies no longer create additional barriers for under-resourced families. This dual approach results in healthier families, a more reliable workforce, improved educational outcomes for children, and reduced strain on emergency rooms, law enforcement, and social services.

What began as two Getting Ahead classes serving 45 individuals has grown into a comprehensive program offering nine classes and serving more than 125 participants weekly. Our services now include Staying Ahead classes, bilingual programming, childcare, transportation support, dental and vision care, legal services, micro-loans, and academic support for children. These wraparound services are critical, as the transition from poverty to stability is a journey—one that requires continued guidance, resources, and encouragement beyond initial program completion.

Community investment has been strong, with local businesses and organizations contributing an additional \$12,000–\$30,000 annually to support meals, volunteers, and engagement. However, this support alone cannot sustain the core infrastructure required to deliver high-quality programming and measurable outcomes for the 615 families who have already graduated and the hundreds more we serve each year.

Looking ahead, Muskogee Bridges seeks to build on its success by developing a Bridges Leadership Academy, expanding post-graduation engagement through a Progress Points program, and offering additional opportunities such as GED preparation, naturalization classes, and career-focused scholarships. Without continued funding, these classes, resources, and essential wraparound services would cease—putting at risk not only individual family progress, but the broader community gains achieved over the past decade and a half.

Continued investment in Muskogee Bridges Out of Poverty is an investment in long-term community stability, economic mobility, and health equity—ensuring that families not only survive, but truly thrive.

Without continued funding, the classes, trainings, resources and wrap around services for our 615 families that have graduated, would come to an end.

Program/Project Description*

Please give a detailed description of your project/program.

Muskogee Bridges Out of Poverty is a comprehensive, community-wide initiative designed to help families move out of generational poverty by addressing both individual barriers and the systems that perpetuate them. Using the nationally recognized *Bridges Out of Poverty* framework and the *Getting Ahead in a Just-Getting'-By World* curriculum, the program empowers individuals to build stability, increase self-sufficiency, and create lasting change for their families, while educating the broader community on the complexities of poverty. The core of the program is the *Getting Ahead* class, a 20-week course offered twice each year to adults living at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level in Muskogee. Participants, referred to as “Investigators,” examine their lived experiences to identify personal, community, and systemic barriers to stability. Through facilitated discussion and practical learning, participants build resources in financial literacy, goal setting, social capital, and problem solving. Investigators receive a \$25 stipend per class to

reduce barriers to participation and recognize the value of their time. A distinguishing feature of Muskogee Bridges is its strong engagement with community leaders - guest speakers from local government, law enforcement, education, housing, behavioral health, and social services participate in classes, creating dialogue that increases understanding and highlights policy-level barriers that individuals cannot overcome alone. Insights gathered from Investigators inform the work of the 12-member volunteer Board of Directors, which advocates for community-level change.

Recognizing that economic mobility is a long-term process, graduates are encouraged to continue through *Staying Ahead* classes, including Money Matters 101, Boundaries, Navigating Nutrition, Invitation to Change, and Parent University, all offered in English and Spanish. Participants also receive wraparound support such as dental and vision care, legal services, micro-loans, transportation assistance through a car donation program, success coaching, and access to community resources.

While parents attend classes, children receive high-quality childcare focused on positive behavior development and academic enrichment using the Khan Academy. Participating children have demonstrated academic gains of at least two grade levels per semester in math and grammar, directly addressing generational poverty.

In addition to direct services, Muskogee Bridges conducts community workshops for employers and organizations, educating more than 3,000 leaders on the realities of poverty. These trainings have led to improved workplace practices, policy changes, and employment opportunities for participants. Over 15 years, Muskogee Bridges Out of Poverty has served more than 615 families, with outcomes including increased stability, improved housing, higher educational attainment, greater self-sufficiency, and increased hope. Through a holistic, dignity-centered approach and strong community collaboration, Muskogee Bridges continues to strengthen families and build a healthier, more resilient Muskogee.

Core Strengths*

What are your organization's core strengths that uniquely position you to provide this service?

Proven, Long-Term Impact with Measurable Outcomes - this is not a pilot program, we have 15-years of operation with clear quantified outcomes.

Comprehensive Model that addresses root causes and the ecosystem of poverty.

Unique Dual-Focus: Empowering Families and Systems Change - Families investigate their own barriers and build agency. Businesses, agencies, and policymakers are educated to stop reinforcing those barriers. Policy and practice changes result from real data.

Strong Community Integration and Cross-Sector Collaboration - Our partnerships are deep and diverse, referrals from courts, DHS, mental health, housing, and schools along with active engagement from city leadership, law enforcement, educators, and employers and a board composed of decision-makers from key sectors are operationally involved. This demonstrates community buy-in, trust, and credibility.

Participant-Centered, Dignity-Based Approach - Focusing on the Investigator's lived experience, they are treated as contributors, not recipients, their insights drive community-level change. The model builds dignity and confidence.

Cultural and Linguistic Accessibility - Offering all major programs in English and Spanish shows intentional inclusivity.

National Credibility - We are not isolated—we are part of a nationally recognized Bridges framework and are described as a national leader.

Strong Consistent Leadership and Vision with an ethical commitment to long-term participant success!

Grant Impact*

How will you define success?

Muskogee Bridges Out of Poverty defines success by helping families move from survival mode to long-term stability and self-sufficiency. Poverty creates barriers to health, education, employment, and transportation, but the most damaging impact is the chronic stress caused by scarcity. By reducing that stress and increasing access to resources, families experience improved physical, mental, and social health.

Program success is measured through increased economic stability, employment with benefits, improved housing, educational attainment, and reduced reliance on public assistance. These gains produce healthier children, stronger families, better employees, and long-term reductions in community costs related to emergency healthcare, crime, and social services.

Over 15 years, the program has demonstrated measurable outcomes: 92% of graduates report living above the federal poverty guideline; 83% report increased stability; 78% have improved their housing situation; and 140 families are fully self-sufficient and no longer rely on social services. Additional outcomes include increased educational attainment, home ownership, civic engagement, and hope for the future.

By empowering families while educating employers, agencies, and policymakers, Muskogee Bridges Out of Poverty creates sustainable change that improves health and wellness outcomes for individuals, families, and the broader Muskogee community.

Collaboration*

Please describe your organization's strongest collaborations.

St. Paul United Methodist Church provides the facility for Getting Ahead classes.

The Gospel Rescue Mission, DHS, Community Sentencing, Mental Health Court, MCCOYS, and Green Country refer families for classes.

The Muskogee Housing Authority, TANF, Green Country Behavioral Health, Health Department and Police Department, Chamber of Commerce, Muskogee Public Schools, City of Muskogee, Women Who Care are guest speakers.

ICTC and NSU provides space for Community workshops.

The Bridges Board of Directors are made up of community leaders representing Housing, Police, Education, Business, Mental Health, Court System, Faith Based, and City Council sectors of our community.

6 local banks provide funds for financial literacy classes. 22 local business and organizations sponsor meals.

Financial Information

Dollar Amount Requested*

What is the total amount requested from the Foundation for the project/program?

\$2,300,000.00

Type of Funding*

What type of funding are you requesting? Check all that apply. (Capital = building campaign/expansion/"bricks & mortar"; Operational = payroll, day to day operations of the organization/administration, etc.; Projects/Programs = specific and direct project or program support)

Operational

Total Program Budget*

What is the total budget for the requested program/project?

\$2,300,000.00

Total Organization Budget*

What is the total budget for your organization?

\$2,300,000.00

Use of Funding*

Explain as specifically as possible how the City of Muskogee Foundation funding will be utilized to support the program/project.

City of Muskogee Foundation funding will support the core operations of Muskogee Bridges Out of Poverty, ensuring the continued delivery of evidence-based programming and essential services for families working to move out of generational poverty. Grant funds will be used to operate the Getting Ahead in a Just-Getting'-By World classes and post-graduation Staying Ahead classes, including the purchase of curriculum materials and workbooks, class supplies, childcare, and participant stipends that reduce barriers to consistent attendance.

In addition, it will sustain critical wraparound services that directly address barriers to stability, including dental and vision care, legal services, micro-loans, transportation assistance through the car donation program, ongoing success coaching, and access to community resources.

Funds will also support program staffing, including the Executive Director, English and Spanish Success Coaches, a part-time accountant, and childcare workers who provide safe, structured care during weekly classes. These staff positions are essential to program coordination, participant support, data tracking, and outcome measurement.

This funding ensures program continuity, protects long-term outcomes for participating families, and preserves the community-wide impact Muskogee Bridges Out of Poverty has built over the past 15 years.

Primary Sources of Funding*

Please list your top five funding sources.

The primary source of funding is the City of Muskogee Foundation.

Other funding sources are random donations from private organizations or individuals that are not solicited.

\$5000 - Bank of Oklahoma

\$5000 - Trust of Gladys Staton distributed by Judge Weldon Stout

\$4000 - O-I

\$3305 - Tom Martindale & Hattie's House profits from wooden bowls Tom makes and sells there

\$1900 - Martin Designs (monthly donations)
\$1250 - Ekklessia Church (meal sponsorships)

Other Funding Sources*

What are the other funding sources or projected sources of this project/program (if any)?
(Other foundations, private donors, federal grants, etc.). Please specify which funders have been secured with dollar amounts and which are projected with dollar amounts.

All donations received from private donors and organizations are random, unexpected, and not budget for.

However, we do solicit for meal sponsorships at \$250 each and usually get around 35 out of 40 meals paid for. With the price of food rising, these do not always cover the entire cost and we use non-restricted donations to offset the difference.

Program/Project Sustainability*

Will this program/project continue if the City of Muskogee Foundation does not provide grant funding?

No.

The organization leverages community partnerships, in-kind support, and private donations to supplement grant funding, and continues to strengthen local investment. Foundation support ensures program stability while Muskogee Bridges builds long-term capacity and diversified funding to sustain its impact.

Organization Information

Prior to submitting your Letter of Inquiry, please ensure all attachments are uploaded and formatted properly. Documents that are uploaded should be in Microsoft Excel, Word or Adobe PDF format only.

City of Muskogee Foundation – Committee Mission & Focus Areas

Please review the [committee mission and focus](#) areas and select the correct committee for which you are applying.

Committee Selection*

Health & Wellness

Project Name*

Name of Project

Muskogee Bridges Out of Poverty

Mission Statement*

What is the organization's mission statement?

To empower families to radically change their lives by identifying and overcoming barriers that are keeping them in poverty and to educate the business community about the complexities of poverty.

Background*

Please provide a brief description of your organization, including place and date of formation.

Muskogee Bridges Out of Poverty was formed in 2011 following a planning retreat initiated by the City of Muskogee Foundation. The Health and Wellness Committee asked Tom Martindale to research the effectiveness and potential of Bridges. What began as a small local initiative has grown into a nationally recognized model for community-based poverty reduction.

The organization focuses on empowering individuals experiencing poverty to identify and overcome barriers to stability while educating the broader community on the complexities of poverty. Using the Bridges Out of Poverty framework, Muskogee Bridges brings together families, employers, faith communities, educators, social service agencies, and policymakers to address poverty in a comprehensive and collaborative way.

Through its community-of-practice approach, Muskogee Bridges strengthens families, informs policy and practice, and promotes long-term economic mobility and improved health outcomes for the Muskogee community.

Programs Offered

Please provide information about the *primary programs* offered by your organization. (We are looking for an "elevator pitch")

Muskogee Bridges Out of Poverty provides evidence-based programs that help families break the cycle of generational poverty. The core program, Getting Ahead in a Just-Getting'-By World, is a 20-week course offered twice a year that equips adults with the tools to identify barriers, build resources, set goals, and create long-term stability for their families.

Graduates are encouraged to continue through Staying Ahead classes, including financial literacy, Boundaries for healthy relationships, nutrition, and parenting education, all offered in English and Spanish.

Participants also receive wraparound support such as vehicles, dental and vision care, legal services, micro-loans, and ongoing success coaching.

In addition to direct services, Muskogee Bridges conducts community workshops that educate employers, agencies, and faith organizations on the complexities of poverty, leading to improved policies, stronger workplaces, and increased economic mobility for participating families.

Board Member Contributions*

What types of contributions (i.e. in kind, time, financial) do board members make to the organization?

Board members provide leadership through in-kind contributions, professional expertise, and active governance. Members contribute time through committee service, strategic planning, community advocacy, and policy engagement. Board members also leverage professional networks to build partnerships, secure resources, and promote sustainability, and some provide financial support through personal contributions by sponsoring meals.

Supporting Information

Optional Supporting Documents

Please use this upload area to attach any supporting documents that you would like the grant committee to see as part of your Letter of Inquiry.

Bridges Budget 5 Year.xlsx

Optional Supporting Documents (2)

Please use this upload area to attach any supporting documents that you would like the grant committee to see as part of your Letter of Inquiry

OUTCOMES 2025 printable-2.pdf

File Attachment Summary

Applicant File Uploads

- Bridges Budget 5 Year.xlsx
- OUTCOMES 2025 printable-2.pdf

Bridges Budget 2026 - 2031

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
	26-27	27-28	28-29
Income			
City of Muskogee Foundation	\$ 424,521	\$ 435,134	\$ 456,890
Expenses			
Staff & Childcare Salaries	\$ 237,771	\$ 243,716	\$ 249,808
Payroll Taxes	\$ 22,200	\$ 22,644	\$ 23,097
Fringe - Health Ins, Cell, IRA	\$ 46,979	\$ 49,328	\$ 51,794
Backgroud Checks	\$ 1,500	\$ 1,500	\$ 1,500
Supplies - Books for GA & BOP, ink, plates	\$ 11,000	\$ 11,000	\$ 11,000
Meals - will get 40 donated	\$ 4,250	\$ 5,000	\$ 5,000
Occupancy/Facility (Church)	\$ 3,000	\$ 3,000	\$ 3,000
Transportation/Mileage	\$ 500	\$ 500	\$ 500
Conferences - 3 ppl @ National Conf.	\$ 5,000	\$ 5,000	\$ 5,000
Stipends for Investigators	\$ 36,000	\$ 36,000	\$ 36,000
Referral Program	\$ 2,400	\$ 2,400	\$ 2,400
Staff Training/Incenctives	\$ 500	\$ 500	\$ 500
Memberships/Subscriptions/Outcomes	\$ 1,000	\$ 1,000	\$ 1,000
Micro-loans/meeting needs	\$ 1,000	\$ 1,000	\$ 1,000
Computers/Equipment	\$ 1,000	\$ 1,000	\$ 1,000
Insurance - Non-Profit Package	\$ 3,500	\$ 3,675	\$ 3,859
Dental and Vision clinics	\$ 3,000	\$ 3,000	\$ 3,000
Annual Audit & Tax Filing	\$ 3,000	\$ 3,000	\$ 3,000
Attorney Services for Grads	\$ 24,000	\$ 24,000	\$ 24,000
Payroll Services	\$ 2,750	\$ 2,882	\$ 3,020
Office Exp. Rent, util, lawn, pest, janit, net	\$ 27,482	\$ 28,856	\$ 30,298
Total Expenses	\$ 437,832	\$ 449,000	\$ 459,777

Year 4	Year 5	
29-30	30-31	
		TOTALS
\$ 479,735	\$ 503,721	\$ 2,300,000
\$ 256,054	\$ 262,455	\$ 1,249,804
\$ 23,559	\$ 24,030	\$ 115,530
\$ 54,384	\$ 57,103	\$ 259,587
\$ 1,500	\$ 1,500	\$ 7,500
\$ 11,000	\$ 11,000	\$ 55,000
\$ 5,000	\$ 5,000	\$ 24,250
\$ 3,000	\$ 3,000	\$ 15,000
\$ 500	\$ 500	\$ 2,500
\$ 5,000	\$ 5,000	\$ 25,000
\$ 36,000	\$ 36,000	\$ 180,000
\$ 2,400	\$ 2,400	\$ 12,000
\$ 500	\$ 500	\$ 2,500
\$ 1,000	\$ 1,000	\$ 5,000
\$ 1,000	\$ 1,000	\$ 5,000
\$ 1,000	\$ 1,000	\$ 5,000
\$ 4,052	\$ 4,254	\$ 19,340
\$ 3,000	\$ 3,000	\$ 15,000
\$ 3,000	\$ 3,000	\$ 15,000
\$ 24,000	\$ 24,000	\$ 120,000
\$ 3,165	\$ 3,318	\$ 15,136
\$ 31,813	\$ 33,404	\$ 151,853
\$ 470,927	\$ 482,465	\$ 2,300,000

OUTCOMES 2025

MUSKOGEE BRIDGES

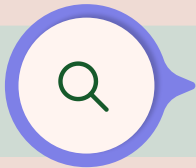
Empowering low-income families to radically change their lives by discovering and overcoming barriers to success.

615

GETTING AHEAD IN A JUST GETTIN-BY WORLD GRADUATES



APPLY



INTERVIEW



GETTING AHEAD CLASS



GRADUATION



STAYING AHEAD CLASSES

92% ARE NOW ABOVE THE FEDERAL POVERTY LINE

83%

are more stable since taking the class



371 Graduates were contacted for follow-up questions

47% HAVE HEALTH INSURANCE

INCOME INCREASED



Improved Their Education



221 GRADS

90%

are more aware of resources

157

Purchased a Home

107

are registered voters

50

have a College degree

101

have their G.E.D.

Hope



Average level of HOPE rose from a 3 to a 9 over the 20-week class!

OFF SOCIAL SERVICES



140 Graduates are now **SELF-SUFFICIENT!**

Reducing the burden on social service agencies, the crime rate, and the emergency room

Getting Ahead class helps participants stabilize their lives by using resources to overcome obstacles that are keeping them stuck in survival mode!

Improved their housing situation

292 GRADS

78%

