

A Guide to Funding Your LENA Grow Program



LENA[®]

v. 20231211

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Introduction

Welcome! We're delighted that you are interested in seeking funding to support your LENA Grow program. We're here to help every step of the way. As you review the content provided in this guide, please feel free to contact our philanthropy team with any questions.

The language provided here is a starting point for adding LENA Grow to your grant or funding application. To follow funder instructions, we realize it may be necessary to modify the language presented here. However, some parts of this document have been carefully crafted by our internal content experts and, to ensure accuracy, should not be adjusted.

Below is a chart with guidelines on what should be customized and what should remain the same. Content headers and sections are color coded to aid you in determining the level at which changes should or should not occur.

Do Customize With Regional Information	Proceed with Caution	Do Not Change
Incorporate information and statistics specific to your community to make the section compelling for your local funder.	While you can update portions of the language, wide deviation may change the intent or factual validity of the template material.	Changing this language could change the meaning. If you have questions about incorporating the language into a particular grant proposal, please reach out to Jen Rhodes, Philanthropic Impact Manager (jenrhodes@lena.org).

Program Description

Can be edited for length and some content — proceed with caution.

(120 words)

Teacher-child interactions play a critical role in the quality of a child's experience in early childhood education settings. However, educators often lack training on how to create robust early language environments for the infants, toddlers, and preschoolers in their care. LENA Grow provides that type of vital training, offering practice-based professional development focused on the power of conversational turns. Conversational turns, just simple serve-and-return interactions, have been linked to improved cognitive, language, and social-emotional development. During LENA Grow, educators receive objective data feedback on classroom interactions combined with strengths-based coaching sessions. Each coaching session provides time for teachers to review and reflect on their talk environment data, then set goals to integrate higher levels of interactive talk into everyday activities.

Program Impact Statement

Can be edited for length and some content — proceed with caution.

(230 words)

LENA Grow is unique among the professional development opportunities available for infant, toddler, and preschool teachers. The program draws on LENA's widely validated "talk pedometer" technology, automatically generating reports that uniquely describe children's language environments and motivate teachers to increase interactive talk.

Either virtually or in person, coaches meet with teachers on a weekly basis, discussing the details of their LENA reports and exploring just how much back-and-forth interaction the children in their care receive. Together, the coach and teacher identify opportunities to increase responsive teacher-child exchanges, using such resources as LENA's 14 Talking Tips.

A wide range of organizations implement LENA Grow, including CCR&Rs, Head Start/Early Head Start, school districts, state departments of education, and universities.

Two independent evaluations completed in 2022 proved LENA Grow's effectiveness at increasing children's TS GOLD® language and literacy scores and teachers' self-efficacy and job satisfaction. Additional evaluations have shown that LENA Grow classrooms achieve higher CLASS® scores as well, especially within the domain of Instructional Support. In addition, children participating in LENA Grow have experienced significant acceleration in social-emotional development, as measured by the Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA).

To date, LENA Grow has directly impacted more than 35,000 children and 10,000 early childhood educators. Importantly, those children who began the program experiencing the least amount of interactive talk saw the greatest gains, benefiting from a greater than 50 percent increase in interactions.

Who Does the Program Serve?

Can be edited to incorporate to make the section more compelling for your local funder.

(120 words)

LENA Grow is an evidence-based professional development program for infant, toddler, and preschool educators. The program supports stakeholders at every level, helping teachers gain the skills necessary to measurably improve classroom quality by boosting interactions, helping coaches adopt a novel, data-driven approach to complement their other observations of a teacher's practice, and helping leadership make more informed planning and policy decisions. With weekly coaching sessions, teachers gain data insights that go far beyond typical feedback, leading to quality improvement without additional burden on their schedules. Children benefit most of all, as participation in LENA Grow has been linked to improved cognitive, language, and social-emotional development. The program is language agnostic and has been shown to be effective in multilingual environments.



Considerations for Aligning the Proposal to the Grant Maker's Interests

Think specifically about demographics that align with the grant maker's strategic plan:

- Geographic focus.
- Number of participating children.
- Specific populations (socio-economic/ethnic/rural/urban/at-risk populations/etc.).
- Children identified as lower talk (note how they have been identified).
- Care setting: center-based, family child care (FCC), etc.
- Academic achievement (e.g., participants residing in an area where standardized test scores are historically below average).

Program Measurement Statements

Most grants require a statement explaining how you will measure programmatic success. One key advantage of LENA Grow is that many measurements and data collection tools are built into the programming. However, you may need to gather additional data to meet your funder's specific requirements.

Measurements you might consider when writing your grant:

- Number of children reached.
- Increases in adult words and conversational turns measured by LENA.
- Increased equity of talk environment for children who start out experiencing the least amount of talk.
- Family engagement.
- Change in teacher self-efficacy as measured by LENA's Teacher Perception Survey.
- School readiness targets for your community.
- Teacher retention.
- Specific demographics served.

Success measurements should be dictated by your specific program, who your organization serves, your own measurement tools, and your own collected data in a way that best serves your organization. If you have specific questions related to LENA measurements, please feel free to reach out to us.

Finding Funding Sources

LENA will provide you with a budget template to help assess your funding needs for the program. Program sites have used a variety of funding sources, including ESSA Title 1, CLSD, and PDG B-5 grants, local philanthropic partners, research partners, school district budgets, economic council budgets, intervention agencies, and in-kind funding of staff time and resources.

Private funding can come from a variety of sources, including private foundations, corporations, unions, religious groups, local agencies, service organizations, events, and individuals. Private fundraising gives you the opportunity to spread the message about the work you're doing through LENA programming.

The websites below may be a helpful starting point for identifying private funding opportunities:

- The Grantsmanship Center – www.tgci.com
- Candid – www.candid.org
- GrantsAlert.com – www.grantsalert.com
- Fundsnet Services – www.fundsnet.com
- Chronicle of Philanthropy – www.philanthropy.com
- The NonProfit Times – www.nptimes.com
- Federal Grants – www.grants.gov
- Grantstation – www.grantstation.com

LENA Organizational Information

Changing this language could change the meaning — do not edit.

LENA History and Mission

LENA was founded in 2004 by the late Terry Paul and his wife, Judi, entrepreneurs who pioneered reading, math, and testing products used in 70,000 schools in the United States and more than 50 countries worldwide.

Terry believed in the power of early talk. While previous research had depended on tedious, manual analysis of audio recordings, he had a vision for automating the task. Objectively measuring adult-child conversation, Terry thought, could transform a simple concept — early talk — into a world-changer.

Twenty years later, LENA has become the industry standard for measuring early talk, used by programs and researchers all around the world. LENA's programs use "talk pedometer" technology to couple actionable feedback with coaching to help adults make proven, sustainable increases in the quality and quantity of interactive talk with children.

LENA Mission Statement

LENA is a national 501(c)(3) nonprofit on a mission to transform children's futures through early talk technology and data-driven programs.

LENA Vision Statement

LENA envisions a world where every child benefits from positive relationships full of responsive interactions.

Who Does LENA Serve?

LENA partner sites across the globe are implementing the technology as part of programs focused on closing opportunity gaps by boosting early language.

- LENA programming serves children 0-5 years old worldwide.
- LENA provides caregivers, teachers, and researchers with actionable data to improve early childhood outcomes.

Where Is LENA?

Organizations all over the world use LENA programs to enrich the language environments of children in their communities. Visit lena.org/where-are-lena-programs for an interactive map of LENA implementation sites across the United States and internationally.

What Is LENA Technology?

LENA uses a small wearable device, often referred to as a "talk pedometer", combined with cloud-based software to deliver detailed feedback to help adults make proven, sustainable increases in interactive talk with children.

- The technology meets U.S. and international safety standards for electronics and toys.
- Unlike a cell phone, it does not transmit, and it uses the same type of low-power processors as hearing aids.

LENA Privacy

In LENA Grow, audio recordings are automatically deleted immediately after processing into data (number of words and turns, etc.). The device has no playback capability, and the software doesn't recognize the meanings of words, so no one can ever tell what was said. LENA maintains Type II SOC 2 compliance, which requires an annual security audit by a third party.

LENA Alignments

The talking points below can be used as additional content for your grant proposal or to help you navigate conversations about LENA. Each of these talking points are aligned with subject headers called “Alignments.” Alignments are most effective when they demonstrate how LENA can help achieve goals or outcomes that are shared with that specific funder.

You can also refer to LENA’s [blog](#) or [research publications](#) for specific evaluation data that support the case to implement LENA programming.

Program Alignment

Alignment: Fitting the standards of an evidence-based professional development program and parent engagement tool.

LENA Grow:

- Is a practice-based professional development program to help teachers in early childhood classrooms (infant, toddler, and preschool) increase interactive talk and thereby accelerate children’s cognitive, language, and social-emotional development.
- Employs LENA’s “talk pedometer” technology, concise coaching curriculum, and reference materials to help teachers build more talk into their daily activities without burdening their schedules or distracting from care of the children.
- Provides objective measurement of children’s language environments without introducing additional assessments into the classroom.
- Addresses the recognized need for more professional education for early childhood teachers, especially in the 0-5 age range.
- Has been shown to help teachers increase interaction, individualize their communication for each child, and build responsive caregiving skills, leading to improved teaching practice and measurable increases in scores on independent classroom- and child-level assessments.
- Helps improve parent and family engagement by making parents more aware of the power of early talk.

Research Alignments

Alignment: Detailing the need for the programming.

- Each year, of the four million children who enter kindergarten in the United States, about 25 percent arrive in the classroom without the academic, social, emotional, and self-regulatory skills they need to thrive at school.
- A poll conducted by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association reveals an increase in hearing, speech, and language referrals since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Acknowledging the complex web of factors that affect children’s early development, LENA has identified an important starting point: early talk.
- Early talk is one of the most important factors shaping children’s brain development during the first few years of life.
- Brains are built from the ground up. Unlike other organs, the human brain is unfinished at birth, and must be built through interactions with adults. Research shows that back-and-forth interactions with adult caregivers are one of the most powerful tools to create a firm foundation of healthy brain architecture for children.
- During the first three years of life, infant and toddler brains form more than one million neural connections every second, the Harvard Center on the Developing Child reports. That means that these years offer a unique developmental opportunity.

Alignment: Providing evidence to support the desired success/outcomes of this program.

Early talk research says:

- During a child's first five years, interactive talk is one of the most critical factors driving brain structure and function.
- Using "decontextualized language," or talking about things beyond what is happening in a child's immediate surroundings, is particularly important for vocabulary development.
- Children who experience more interactive talk have more gray matter in the surface area of the left perisylvian cortex, an area of the brain associated with language production and comprehension.
- Improving children's language exposure via prevention and intervention programs may benefit their structural brain development.
- Children who experience more conversations with adults have patterns of cortical structure in language-supporting regions of the brain that are linked with greater reading proficiency.
- The amount of talk with adults that children experience in the first three years of life is related to their verbal abilities and IQ scores in adolescence.
- Conversational turns are one of the most predictive metrics of child outcomes.
- Conversational turns have more brain-building power than adult words alone.
- Regular feedback to teachers and caregivers on the early language environment has been shown to increase interactive talk and child language ability.
- Early language is the strongest single predictor of cognitive development.
- The amount of language a child hears affects brain processing speed and subsequent vocabulary acquisition.
- The quantity of conversational turns a child experiences at 18 months of age predicts social-emotional competencies both one and four years later.
- Aggregated results show that relative to where they started, children whose parents or teachers participate in LENA programs experience more brain-building interactions, particularly those who started the programs experiencing the least amount of talk.

Technology Alignments

Alignment: Ensuring data security.

LENA:

- Maintains Type II SOC 2 compliance, which means that every year an outside group audits LENA to confirm that appropriate data and privacy protections are in place and are used correctly.
- Has built and implemented a multitude of technologies and processes to protect data.
- Ensures that its technology has no playback capability, and that software doesn't recognize the meanings of words, so no one can ever tell what was said.
- Ensures that audio files are automatically deleted immediately after processing into data (number of words and turns, etc.).
- Ensures that each group provides participants with its own consent form, and that teachers and parents have the option to participate or not.

Alignment: Using technology to provide actionable data and measurable outcomes.

LENA:

- Has conducted peer-reviewed research showing that there's significant variability in how much adults talk with children and that those who talk the least tend to overestimate how much they talk the most.
- Provides actionable data through clear reporting, indicating how much interaction is actually happening.
- Acknowledges research showing that adult talk levels vary significantly during the course of the day and from week to week.
- Provides clear reports through captured data indicating exactly when high talk and low talk times occur during the course of a LENA Day, acknowledging research showing that adult talk levels vary significantly during the course of the day and from week to week.

- Uses language-measurement technology as an objective tool to help parents and teachers understand, measure, and increase conversations with children.
- Has validated its technology's language statistics in a large-scale study that established norms for adult words, conversational turns, and child vocalizations. Using these norms, LENA has the ability to translate the amount of talk happening in a given context, environment, or time.

Education Alignment

Alignment: Ensuring all children enter kindergarten prepared to learn.

LENA Grow participation:

- Increases CLASS® scores across all domains.
- Increases TS GOLD® scores in the domains of Language, Literacy, Cognitive, and Social-Emotional.
- Increases DECA scores.
- Brings children out of language isolation.
- Creates more equitable language environments.
- Increases teacher job satisfaction, self-efficacy, and retention.
- Aligns with and enhances a wide range of tools, including CLASS®, Head Start Performance Standards and Early Learning Outcomes, ZERO TO THREE Critical Competencies™, and the Pyramid Model for Promoting Social Emotional Competencies in Infants and Young Children.

Development Alignment

Alignment: Addressing challenging behaviors.

LENA Grow participation:

- Contributes to the increase in a young child's capacity for and comfort with verbal communication, which decreases behavioral problems and associated parent and educator stress.
- Supports a rich talk environment, which is critical for building not only a child's language and literacy skills, but also social-emotional development.
- Has been linked to accelerated social-emotional development, as measured by DECA and TS GOLD® assessments.

Professional Development Alignment

Alignment: Ensuring child care providers are trained, receive ongoing professional development, and maintain quality standards.

LENA Grow participants:

- Report significant increases in self-efficacy, job satisfaction, and beliefs and actions that support equitable language development.
- Are more likely to stay in the teaching profession than educators who did not participate, according to statistically significant data analysis.

Outcomes Alignment

Alignment: Ensuring that measurable outcomes are available and clearly defined.

LENA:

- Provides clear reports that can be used to show growth in conversational turns and to identify opportunities to increase talk.
- Provides comprehensive coach training to ensure children's data is understood and acted upon appropriately.
- Tracks the number of children served through its LENA Online platform, providing clear outcomes data.
- Considers an increase in conversational turns to be a proxy for the increased quality of those interactions.
- Measures teacher satisfaction via surveys.

Body of evidence to support funding opportunities

For studies validating the accuracy of LENA technology and its proven effectiveness in interventions and research studies, see our full bibliography of [more than 200 peer-reviewed publications](#).

You may also access a multitude of viewpoints and stories supporting LENA programming outcomes and impacts by reading our [blog](#). Use the search bar or tagging system to find posts that may help support your grant application.

LENA's [Inside Early Talk report](#) and web page detailing the [state of interaction in early childhood](#) education are also an excellent resources to learn more about the importance of early talk.

Supplemental Responses to Common Grant Questions

Responses should always be modified to reflect individual organization's goals, expected outcomes, populations served, etc. The responses below are samples. Please feel free to use the responses and modify as needed to better serve your organization's purpose.

Sample Question: Grant Request Summary (~250 words)

Example answer for LENA Grow funding – for illustrative purposes only. Modify accordingly:

In (STATE), partners with diverse agencies across the state support their early literacy and learning initiatives using LENA programming. Currently at least XX% of the children served by LENA programs in (STATE) are low income. There are approximately XX,X00 children 0-5 residing in low income households. XYZ's vision by 20XX is to serve XX% of this population (X,XXX children) annually through approximately XXX family child care providers, XXX child care classrooms, and XX home-visiting or parent-facing organizations.

LENA Grow is an important part of this vision. As an innovative, evidence-based professional development program for infant, toddler, and preschool educators, LENA Grow is a scalable way to improve school readiness and development outcomes. Measuring the most predictive elements of child outcomes, LENA Grow supports stakeholders at every level, helping teachers gain the skills to measurably improve classroom quality by boosting interactions and helping leadership make more informed planning and policy decisions.

The program couples LENA's "talk pedometer" technology with weekly coaching sessions. Teachers gain data insights that go far beyond typical feedback, leading to quality improvement without additional burden on their schedules.

Support from the ABC Fund will allow XYZ to offset the programmatic costs of new LENA Grow sites and ensure implementation is completed with ease and success. Moreover, those partners who are ready and serving those in the most need will be able to participate immediately, rather than waiting until other resources become available.

We will use the funds to cover the cost of materials, equipment, and staff time as we expand LENA Grow throughout (STATE).

Key:

ABC – name of funding organization

XX – representative of a number

XYZ – name of the organization to implement LENA programming

Sample Question: What is Your Plan To Recruit/Engage/Serve Your Target Population? (~450 words)

Example answer for LENA Grow funding – for illustrative purposes only. Modify accordingly:

Enthusiasm and commitment from teachers and center directors are some of the most important elements for LENA Grow's success. For many, access to objective, scientific data about the children in their classroom motivates participation.

To that end, we plan to implement LENA Grow in XX classrooms in the ABC area. We will select these classrooms based on the providers' participation in the [insert name of school readiness or other relevant program]. A key component of our implementation's success will be to measure job satisfaction and performance as reported by teachers through teacher-completed questionnaires. These surveys help us understand the impact of professional learning on the child care provider itself, which can impact mid-term and long-term outcomes of teacher retention. We project XX% of teachers will report increased job satisfaction and confidence in teaching abilities.

Once classrooms are selected, XYZ will collaborate with LENA to train XYZ coaches on the program. These coaches will use the curriculum with the teachers assigned to each of the XX classrooms through a five-week LENA Grow sequence. Each week, once a week, the children in each of the XX classrooms will wear a LENA device to understand their language environment. At the same time, each of their teachers will progress through a practice-based curriculum to review these reports, learn best practices to increase interactive talk with every child in the classroom, further their knowledge of brain development, and celebrate their success week to week. This plan addresses both the need for feedback by early childhood teachers and the need to close the opportunity gap for children through increased interactive talk.

The LENA program will also be used to help build rapport with parents of children participating in the program. Parents will be directed to the [insert local early intervention] program if it has been determined that families need additional support from an early child care educational program, early intervention, health service, or family support. By implementing LENA Grow in our classrooms, we anticipate a significant increase in the number of conversational turns between teachers and children, especially for those children who start with the fewest number of interactions, supporting stronger teacher-child relationships and early language and literacy outcomes. We expect gains of up to XX% for children starting out in the lowest third of their room, in those rooms with overall low conversational turns.

XYZ will provide facilities and teachers participating in the LENA program a range of supports to engage children and families in infant and toddler classrooms. Selected facilities and participating teachers will receive training on LENA technology. Teachers will receive coaching and training that focuses on emotional support, curriculum implementation, and developmentally appropriate practices. These classrooms will also receive resources that help teachers increase communication. Teachers will also be eligible for a stipend based on CLASS® score results.

Key:

ABC – name of community/county/city

XX – representative of a number

XYZ – name of the organization to implement LENA programming

Program Need Statement (~250 words)

Each year, four million children enter kindergarten in the United States. Of these, about 25 percent arrive in the classroom without the academic, social, emotional, and self-regulatory skills they need to thrive at school.

LENA has identified a starting point to address these issues. Early talk is one of the most important factors shaping children's cognitive, language, and social-emotional development during the first few years of life.

Unlike other organs, the human brain is unfinished at birth, and must be built through interactions with adults. Research shows that back-and-forth interactions with adult caregivers are one of the most powerful tools to create a firm foundation of healthy brain architecture for children.

During the first three years of life, infant and toddler brains are forming more than one million neural connections every second, the Harvard Center on the Developing Child reports. That means that these years offer a unique developmental opportunity.

Young children need responsive interactions with adults to help their brains grow, develop, and reach their full potential. LENA's research indicates that most adults tend to overestimate how much they talk with children, and those who talk the least tend to overestimate the most. Using LENA technology, caregivers will know exactly how much they are communicating with the children they care for.

LENA Grow couples actionable feedback with coaching to make proven, sustainable increases in the quality and quantity of talk with children. Results include stronger families, improved classroom quality, and increased early literacy and school readiness.

General Impact Statement (~100 Words)

The impact of LENA Grow is primarily measured in two ways. First, LENA metrics associated with counts of adult words and conversational turns are examined. These measures indicate behavior change on the part of the educators. Child impact can be measured through pre/post third-party assessments, such as TS GOLD®.

Through a focus on actionable feedback and coaching, LENA has helped communities all over the world provide programs for parents and teachers that create sustainable increases in the quality and quantity of talk with children. Many independent evaluations have shown similar results using LENA: stronger families, improved classroom quality, and increased early literacy and school readiness.

Sample Grant Application Question: What is the Projected Impact To Be Achieved? (~150 Words)

Example answer for LENA Grow funding – for illustrative purposes only. Modify accordingly:

XYZ is excited about the opportunity to introduce LENA Grow to the ABC community. LENA is committed to helping communities boost school readiness and improve child outcomes through early talk. We estimate XX children will be impacted in year 1, based on XX children in each classroom and our initial goal to partner with approximately XX ABC early learning providers. In ABC County, XYZ contracts with XX early learning providers to offer subsidized child care services for ABC children. Currently there are approximately XX infants and toddlers enrolled and receiving early learning services in the ABC area. Child care facilities participating in this initiative will have profound impact in the areas of program environment, teaching and learning strategies, community partnerships, family support, and fostering positive teacher-child relationships. Any child identified as needing additional support will be referred to [insert local early intervention org] with parental consent.

Key:

ABC – name of community/county/city

XX – representative of a number

XYZ – name of the organization to implement LENA programming

Sample Grant Application Question: How Will the Impact of This Program Be Measured? (~250 words)

Example answer for LENA Grow funding – for illustrative purposes only. Modify accordingly:

XYZ will use a variety of tools to capture the effectiveness of the LENA program. Participating classrooms will receive a pre and post assessment. LENA technology will capture data for measuring talk with children, a critical factor in early brain development. The algorithms are trained to identify and differentiate adult speech, child speech, and TV/electronic noise. The software will generate objective, actionable feedback reports for caregivers on the quantity of talk in the child's environment. The data reports will allow for an understanding of the short-term and mid-term impact of this investment.

The CLASS® assessment will measure the level of teacher-child interaction. XYZ support staff will use the data from the CLASS® assessment scores to provide weekly coaching opportunities for participating teachers. During these sessions, feedback and delivery will be based on LENA coaching guidance, LENA reports, CLASS® observations, and LENA's Talking Tips.

In analyzing the pre/post CLASS® scores, we aim to observe increases in the amount of conceptual development, quality feedback, and language modeling in participating classrooms. Impact Reports illustrate room- and site-level pre/post comparisons. These reports provide details on the child-level experience in response to the program and are a helpful measure of progress four weeks into the program, as well as a helpful outcome measure at the end of the program.

We will also measure job satisfaction and performance as reported by teachers through questionnaires to help us understand the impact of professional learning on the child care provider.

Key:

XYZ – name of the organization to implement LENA programming