

Ambrose Monell Grant Application  
Shining Light Foundation

**Organization**

Name: Shining Light Foundation

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**IRS Determination Letter: 501 (c) (3)**

Yes   X   No

**Mission Statement (6000 characters or less)**

The Shining Light Foundation's mission statement is: To provide assistance to underserved children from low-to-moderate income families for academic, cultural, and personal enrichment so that *every child's light will shine*.

**Background Statement (12,000 characters or less)**

Founded in 1996, the Shining Light Foundation's Cultural Enrichment Program provides the financial means for school children to participate in extra-curricular activities, class field trips, tutoring services, school bands and orchestras. Additionally, our organization helps secure needed equipment and supplies that enhance the learning experience for children. Our partnership with the Lafayette Parish (county) School System (a public school system) has been and continues to demonstrate that there are true needs for school children in our community.

The Shining Light Foundation is an all-volunteer organization with a Board of Directors that includes eighteen (18) members, one of which is the President, and a volunteer Executive Director. Volunteers (our Board of Directors) work closely with Lafayette Parish School System principals, teachers and guidance counselors to address the extra-curricular educational needs of school children. A letter of understanding is renewed each school calendar year with the school system's superintendent (available upon request).

We are a non-profit, 501 (c) (3) organization with a relatively small budget compared to other organizations and agencies in south Louisiana. Our organization has been recognized for its transparency and astute fiscal management. We are an agency of last resort that offers unique programs and services to students in need. Currently, our fiscal year 2016-2017 budget is \$23,503.00 of which \$13,292.00 is dedicated to our programs and services. At this time, we serve only Lafayette Parish in the state of Louisiana; however, our recently completed strategic plan calls for growth, sustainability, and to expand our programs and services to an adjoining south Louisiana parish. This expansion will require the hiring of a part-time Executive Director to facilitate this growth and ensure the organization's continuity into the future.

A brief description details how our organization coordinates its partnership with the Lafayette Parish School System. Shining Light Foundation volunteers attend workshops and orientations to inform the school system faculty and administrators of our programs and services. They advise school administrators how to access our website ([www.shininglightfoundation.org](http://www.shininglightfoundation.org)), online application forms, and how to submit these to our organization. A volunteer *School Liaison* works closely with principals, teachers and guidance counselors to ensure the application process is effective for the parent/guardian, their child and the school system. The Shining Light Foundation Program and Services Committee conducts a monthly review of applicants for consideration. Once approved, the volunteer Executive Director advises school administrators of the awarded assistance and sends funding to support the applicant.

The program goal is to make it possible for Lafayette Parish school students, pre-kindergarten through eighth grade, to participate in cultural enrichment programs through education-based field trips, obtain musical instruments, participate in musical appreciation programs, attend summer programs that inspire and motivate children, secure supplies and equipment, and make it possible for children to access tutoring services.

Many schools do not have enough instruments for the students who need them to participate in bands and orchestras. Also, many students are left behind while their classmates go on field trips. Assistance is provided to individual children in need whose families lack the financial means to support these extra-curricular activities. Applicants are asked to pay a portion of the cost up to twenty-five percent (25%). To help us determine eligibility, applicants are also asked if the student receives free lunches.

By providing financial assistance for extra-curricular activities, the elementary and middle school children we serve are exposed to new ideas and encouraged to explore

different avenues of learning. This ultimately leads to improved learning and skills that build and instill confidence in other subject areas. “Research has found that learning music facilitates learning other subjects and enhances skills that children inevitably use in other areas. ‘A music-rich experience for children of singing, listening and moving is really bringing a very serious benefit to children as they progress into more formal learning,’ says Mary Luehrisen, executive director of the National Association of Music Merchants (NAMM) Foundation, a not-for-profit association that promotes the benefits of making music.” Additionally...“A study published in 2007 by Christopher Johnson, professor of music education and music therapy at the University of Kansas, revealed that students in elementary schools with superior music education programs scored around 22 percent higher in English and 20 percent higher in math scores on standardized tests, compared to schools with low-quality music programs, regardless of socioeconomic disparities among the schools or school districts. Johnson compares the concentration that music training requires to the focus needed to perform well on a standardized test.” (Source: <http://www.pbs.org/parents/education/music-arts/the-benefits-of-music-education/>)

Band participation fosters a lifelong appreciation and engagement in music where students are challenged to explore their potential through creativity, communication, collaboration, and critical thinking. This in turn, helps them to succeed in school and sets the foundation for them to be successful in life.

In addition to a child’s exposure to music, another study conducted by the University of Arkansas shows that school children “and in particular, disadvantaged students, who take field trips that provide cultural enrichment experiences, add measurable depth to their education. Students who visited the museum were also more likely to express tolerance and historical empathy when completing their surveys.” “Researchers evaluated these traits by asking students to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with statements like ‘I can imagine what life was like for people 100 years ago,’ ‘When looking at a painting that shows people, I try to imagine what those people are thinking,’ and ‘I think people can have different opinions about the same thing.’ Students who had visited the museum were also eight percent of a standard deviation more likely to say they were interested in visiting art museums.” “Researchers noted that these gains were more pronounced in disadvantaged, minority, and rural school groups. “Students from rural and high-poverty schools benefit even more than other students from visiting an art museum,” they wrote. While 63 percent of rural participants who had not visited the museum said they would “tell my friends they should visit an art museum,” 73 percent of rural students who did visit the museum said they would encourage a friend to go. Students from high-poverty schools experienced an 18 percent effect-size improvement in their critical thinking skills.” (Source: <http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2013/09/study-students-really-do-learn-stuff-on-field-trips/279720/>)

The Shining Light Foundation program ensures children, pre-K through eighth grade, have the ability to participate in cultural enrichment opportunities. The program also provides access to other services that otherwise would not be available (e.g., tutoring services, education, music and art supplies, etc.). Over the years, our organization has

served twenty-two (22) out of the twenty-three (23) Lafayette Parish Elementary Schools, ten (10) of which are in geographic areas that serve low-income students. The demographics of the ten schools, which have 5,938 students, consist of an average minority composition of 73%. Many of these students would not have had the opportunity to experience playing a musical instrument or participate with their classmates on field trips. The Shining Light Foundation recently added the Lafayette Parish School System's Pre-K and middle schools to include five (5) schools to date reaching even more children in need of our program and services. Academic years from 2001 to 2015 resulted in our organization serving 1,144 disadvantaged students with \$65,467.50 in financial assistance to support their cultural enrichment activities. With the recent downturn in the energy sector (greater Lafayette economy base) and the flood event of August 2016, we are now serving more children. Three months into this fiscal year (August 2016 – July 2017), we have seen a dramatic increase in applications reaching 75% of our projected number of students.

Enabling children to participate in cultural enrichment opportunities builds self-esteem and can have a positive effect on learning, positive changes in self-confidence, teacher perception and school completion. These experiences spark enthusiasm and prepare them with a rewarding life of continuous learning.

#### **Amount Requested (6,000 characters or less)**

The Shining Light Foundation amount request is \$39,000.00 and will be used as “seed” funding to establish a paid, part-time Executive Director position. The funding will also ensure that we will have the means to support employment taxes associated with this position for two (2) years. The funding request will dedicate \$19,500.00 in annual compensation, including taxes, toward the hiring of a paid, part-time Executive Director. This funding will provide the Shining Light Foundation Board of Directors enough time to develop the financial means to sustain this position into the third year (and thereafter), possibly turning it into a full-time position.

#### **Grant Purpose (12,000 characters or less)**

Keeping in line with the objectives and strategies of our strategic plan, the Shining Light Foundation Board of Directors would like to ensure that the organization is positioned to continue serving the children of Lafayette Parish well into the future. Additionally, the need to reach elementary and middle school students in other areas of the region is great, most especially in the adjoining St. Landry Parish.

Currently, a volunteer Executive Director works, in conjunction with the Board of Directors, to coordinate the organization's activities, which include receiving and reviewing student applications in need of our services. This person also coordinates monthly Board meetings, represents the organization in the community, manages the budget, assists in the development of the organization's strategic plan, policies, procedures and protocols, acts as a liaison to the school system, etc. Since this is a

volunteer position, it would be advantageous for the future of our organization to secure a more permanent position by hiring a part-time Executive Director to fulfill the expectations of this mission-critical role. This will allow for stability in this role and the approach will provide continuity in community engagement, the school systems, donors, with the Board of Directors, etc. The importance of this position will help establish a stronger foundation for our organization to become a viable source of addressing the cultural enrichment needs of school children. It will also allow us to extend our program into the adjoining St. Landry Parish (Louisiana) where the need is great.

Traditionally, our budget has been specifically dedicated to programs and services including expenses associated with delivering those services, special events to support those services, printing, etc. The amount requested for the two year, part-time paid Executive Director position will give the Shining Light Foundation seed money to integrate and engage this position methodically and expansively while, at the same time, provide an opportunity to sustain the future funding of this position via other sources (major gifts, special events, grant opportunities through United Way and/or other grantors, etc.). As the organization grows, additional funding sources will be secured and eventually transform this position into a full-time role to further engage community support in both parishes (Lafayette and St. Landry) in service delivery and financial development. The proposed position will also ensure coverage during the most important time of the day while school hours are in session and school administrators can more readily contact the Shining Light Foundation paid staff person.

The statistical demographic makeup of our current service area, Lafayette Parish, is described below. It also includes the proposed expansion of St. Landry Parish into our service area that has a relatively high number of disadvantaged, minority, rural schools.

The demographic data provides a perspective on the need for our program and services in these areas. In Lafayette Parish, the 2015 population estimate is 240,098. The 2015 Caucasian population is 70.1%; the African American population is estimated at 26.1%; the Native American population is estimated at 0.4%; the Asian population is estimated at 1.8%; and the Hispanic / Latino population is estimated at 4.6%. With regard to education, persons who graduated from high school or higher (percent of persons age 25 years+, 2010-2014) is at 85.7%. Median household income (in 2014 dollars, 2010-2014) is at \$51,406.00. The Lafayette Parish School System has an elementary school population of 14,410 students and a middle school population of 7,136 students. As previously mentioned, the demographics of ten (10) out of twenty-three (23) elementary schools have an average minority composition of 73% which consists of 5,938 students. Of the twenty-three (23) elementary schools, 62.2% of the students are eligible for free lunch, and 9.8% of the students are eligible for reduced cost lunches.

In 2015, the estimated population of St. Landry Parish was 83,848. The 2015 Caucasian population is 56.5%; the African American population is estimated at 41.3%; the Native American population is estimated at 0.4%; the Asian population is estimated at 0.5%; and the Hispanic / Latino population is estimated at 2.1%. With regard to education, persons who graduated from high school or higher (percent of person age 25 years+, 2010-2014)

is at 76.6%. Median household income (in 2014 dollars, 2010-2014) is \$33,928.00. Of the nineteen (19) elementary schools, 74% of the students who are eligible for free lunch, and 8.7% are eligible for reduced cost lunch.

In summary, the Shining Light Foundation would like to establish a paid, part-time Executive Director position to ensure its viability and sustainability well into the future while making a difference to more school children with the expansion into another parish. The Board of Directors developed a strategic plan that calls for taking careful, integral steps with thoughtful objectives and strategies to grow our programs and services. Having a dedicated, paid Executive Director will help us fulfill these expectations. The seed funding will give our organization the means to build upon past experiences and successes.

By providing the means for school children to participate in music and attend cultural enrichment field trips with their classmates, our programs make a positive impact that results in life long learning. Many students who get the opportunity to participate in these extra-curricular activities or receive tutoring have no other means to do so without the financial support of the Shining Light Foundation. Our organization was built on grassroots efforts by community leaders who truly care about all children having an opportunity to be successful in life. There is no doubt that our programs and services help children build character, learn discipline, respect, and integrity while persevering through challenges that help propel them academically.

We would like to close by sharing a letter from a student for whom we provided assistance. The student is now enrolled in college.

*Dear Shining Light Foundation,*

*Hello! I'm in college now studying music and (maybe) Economics at Reed College in Portland, Oregon. I am studying and working very hard to make the grades I want and need. Thus far, I've made many new friends from all over the world and even a person from my high school!*

*I have two on-campus jobs that are right up my alley as well as some hobbies. Fortunately, there is an orchestra and small choir by audition that I have both joined. Lastly, I have a role as a main character in the play 'And I and Silence.' While I may seem busy, I am enjoying every single bit of work I do. If it weren't for the Foundation, I would not have become a more social individual who wanted to travel more often. This summer, I witnessed a very bad car accident in front of my job. Thankfully, no one was seriously hurt, but it was a moment that changed my life. As I ran to her to ask the victims a few dire medical questions, it felt as if it were natural words. I was in control and felt at ease. My point of this is to state that after my undergrad, I will be applying to medical school.*

*My only wish is for this Foundation to be able to support many more students to achieve their goals like I plan on doing. I want to make the Shining Light Foundation proud of*

*me and I don't plan on failing. Thank you for the gift of a lifetime. One day, I too hope to be a part of the Foundation and help kids who are just like me. Again, thank you!*

*Sincerely,  
S.W. (Fall 2015)*