



501(c)(3) Non-Profit

hds foundation

mentoring | achieving | living

B.R.I.D.G.E.S. Grant

2026-2027



2026-2027 B.R.I.D.G.E.S. GRANT APPLICATION

The HDS Foundation, Inc. is a 501 (c)(3) Non-Profit Organization founded to provide mentoring services and opportunities to Teens and Young Adults who have Autism-related disabilities. The primary focus of the Organization is to promote the development of work and daily living skills, build socio-educational transitional experiences via specific school-based partnerships, and support the post-secondary journeys for this growing population. Bridging the gap that can support young adults' diverse abilities and facilitating college-level and other post-secondary education will strengthen this population's chances for meaningful, long-term employment, and self-sufficiency. Teens and young adults can be better prepared to meet these demands when they are addressed, utilizing a spectrum of solutions.

The HDS Foundation supports and partners with community-based groups, aiming to enrich the lives of this special population by providing many social opportunities. These are designed to develop personal growth and independence further. The B.R.I.D.G.E.S. Grant is a funded partnership with High Schools that meet the requirements of this Program. The HDS Foundation is poised to help educate and provide information related to available, safe, and affordable housing options that can further the possibilities of attaining independent or semi-independent housing. These options may be available through Private, Federal, State, and Community-based Programs.

The HDS Foundation reserves the right to modify the requirements of this grant.

HDS Foundation Vision Statement

Empowered teens and young adults with Autism and related abilities thriving with independence and inclusion in their communities.

HDS Foundation Mission Statement

To empower individuals with Autism and related abilities by providing resources, fostering independence, and creating opportunities for education, employment, and housing through collaborative programs and partnerships.

Purpose of the Grant

The purpose of the B.R.I.D.G.E.S. Program is to offer students on the Autism Spectrum a specialized program of interactive community and school-based activities/lessons to help them transition through high school and into post-secondary.

- The Grant award is (up to) \$5,000 per academic year, to a qualifying Florida-Based High School's E.S.E. class. Grant funds can only be used for the program activities based on the B.R.I.D.G.E.S. Grant criteria. This will require the class to have a separate {bank} account.

Eligibility Requirements

- The High School Must Be located in Miami-Dade and/or Broward Counties.
- The School Administration, E.S.E. Department and Facilitators/ Teachers must meet the requirements.
- Eligible students must be on the Diploma without Access/F.S.A. Track (or equivalent)
- The class population must have at least 8 students and not exceed 12 students. Even numbers are recommended for pairing and group activities, though not required.
- Many of these skills and experiences of the B.R.I.D.G.E.S. Program are geared for the transition out of high school. For the experiences to be fresh and relevant, students must be 11th and 12th graders.
- Students may only be part of the Program for two (2) academic years.
- To plan for the CBI's, the High School must create a special class designed to incorporate two periods of the student's daily school schedule (one academic period plus one lunch period) every other day during the block scheduling.
- The B.R.I.D.G.E.S. GRANT will provide the class facilitators/teachers with extra funds to engage in non-typical school activities, organize community-based trips, learn to budget, make purchases, dine out and engage in typical social activities for individuals of their peerage. In addition, these funds will provide financial means for any typical school-based party, prom, and any other related activities that are not funded by the school that would benefit this specific population.

The HDS Foundation recognizes the diversity of each community and school, and as such has created a platform with in-person and virtual options for each applicant to propose their own unique Program that addresses the overall goals of the Grant.

The applicant must fill out the online application and provide a written plan of how their Program will work, including proposed class and community activities, timelines, goals, stakeholders involved, inter-school social plans, and a budget for carrying out these activities. Additionally, the school must identify the school team and administrative staff who will oversee the Program.

Program Goals

Applying schools must be familiar with the HDS Foundation vision and mission, as well as the Program Goals. Applicants must use the GRANT funds accordingly to fulfill both. The following are the Program goals:

- Budgeting
- Resources
- Independence
- Development
- Growth
- Empowerment
- Social Skills

Budgeting

The skills of budgeting, expenditure, and managing money, in general, are important aspects for anyone but challenging at times for this population. Much focus of our Program is put on this component as these are crucial aspects of adulthood and everyday life. Through the Program, students should learn basic skills such as creating a budget, learning to save, opening a bank account, paying a bill, or calculating tips. These components can be taught with a mixture of different activities and Community Based Instruction (CBI) such as creating a shopping challenge, where students will form into groups with a set budget and attempt to buy the most items closest to that amount (i.e., the Walmart challenge). Other activities that can be organized would be a Banking and Budgeting event for students, alongside parents, to open their own account. This could be followed by a visit to the local bank to get more acquainted with their branch, learn about the teller and different transactions such as withdrawing and depositing money, and learning how to use the A.T.M.

Resources

Many of us are unaware of the numerous local, state, and federal resources available to those on the Autism Spectrum. Though some are, at times, limited, services such as Public Transit, Community Outreach, and Vocational Rehab, are some of the many resources that are there to assist in helping our students with everyday life as they transition into post-secondary education or training, and adulthood. Learning about things such as local bus routes, nearby medical centers, community outreach, and understanding what resources they have around them and how to get there are critical skills. Some resources/activities could include creating a map of your community and learning what bus routes are closest; learning to use transit apps on the phone to track where you need to go and what time to be there; visiting a community center and finding out about local events or programs they have available to the public. Another school/class-based activity that can include parents are visits by Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VocRehab) to explain what this resource can do for their students, and how they will need to plan for the available assistance as they transition to graduation. The HDS Foundation can assist with this

event and work with other school resources to get the appropriate VocRehab representatives to come and speak to the parents and/or legal guardians.

Independent Functioning

Independent functioning is comprised of many different aspects of one's life and is something that many of us acquire slowly and take for granted. Students on the Autism Spectrum have different difficulties in learning independent living skills, as many young adults do, because of the lack of exposure and practice of these skills. An essential part of the B.R.I.D.G.E.S. program is helping students learn some of these skills to better prepare them for life after high school, whether in a post-secondary program or while away from family and on their own. Some activities to help teach these skills include going grocery shopping, doing laundry, and time management. Students will reap the benefits of learning how to live on their own and gain confidence by having the ability to do them independently.

Development

Personal development is a large part of the B.R.I.D.G.E.S. program and comes on its own as well as along with some of the other program components. Students will learn development skills on their own while also increasing these skills in many of the other activities such as independent functioning and social skills. Some important lessons in development include learning about health and nutrition, learning coping strategies and stress management skills, and creating an exercise routine. Activities such as creating a school garden or doing different exercise activities such as creating a full-body gym routine, going to a local park with a fitness trail, or organizing a yoga and meditation class, will help students create a healthier mind and body relationship for themselves which can help them live longer more mindful, and more fulfilling lives.

Growth and Empowerment

In addition to more pragmatic skills, it is imperative for students in the class to learn self-awareness and self-confidence. The Growth and Empowerment component should include activities that encourage the students to familiarize themselves with their own strengths and weaknesses. The lessons should motivate them about the future (through outlining personal goals) while teaching them to deal with the present, through coping with daily challenges. Moreover, they must focus on understanding, managing, and communicating their emotions. Targeting non-ASD Peers within the school population from clubs or organizations (or individual students who want to volunteer) and engaging them to be mentors and role models to the students will significantly impact their personal growth and feeling of belonging while in high school and beyond. **Any student who volunteers for these mentorship opportunities may be eligible for service hours from The HDS Foundation, Inc, a Non-Profit 501 © (3).**

The B.R.I.D.G.E.S. Grant also aims to help students develop character and values through volunteering and community outreach to 'give back.' A greater understanding of themselves and others will help the students feel more confident in their abilities. **The B.R.I.D.G.E.S. Grant requires at least one annual event aimed at giving back to the community.** This can be done through visiting and serving in a soup kitchen, forming a beach or park cleanup, participating in

and fundraising in a walk (i.e., during April, National Autism Acceptance Month) or other charitable activities. We want to instill philanthropic values as well as emphasize the importance of being involved in your community and "paying it forward."

Social Skills

The top component of the B.R.I.D.G.E.S. Grant is learning and practicing social skills. Students on the Autism Spectrum struggle with social skills that many of us take for granted. One of the more significant tangible advantages that students have received in the B.R.I.D.G.E.S. program, especially in their second year, is the improvement of social skills and the ability to communicate and spend time with their peers. Teachers should organize activities to make sure the students in the class get to know each other and form friendships.

Teachers still need to focus also on inclusive activities that will help the students be more successful when dealing with their families and typical peers as well as those they will encounter in everyday life. To achieve this, lesson plans can include the difference between verbal and nonverbal communication, developing teamwork, and understanding how one's actions can affect how others feel.

Social skills are critical, together with the other daily living skill components targeted by the B.R.I.D.G.E.S. Program, provide an excellent opportunity for students with Autism and Related Abilities. Each month, the students should be participating in at least one field trip that works alongside the in-class lesson (like visiting a company), and one to two casual social outings (like going out to lunch). Activities should also promote and emphasize problem-solving in social situations: what is appropriate versus what is not, and how to communicate if there is a problem or how to deal with emotions in public. To fulfill these requirements, we encourage activities like holiday-themed events, such as Halloween or a Winter party. School Activities such as Homecoming and Prom can bring an opportunity for the class to create an event and/or participate in peer organizations like Best Buddies, The Friendship Journey, Social Cog or social school clubs that actively work to make lasting friendships between special needs teens and their peers.

II. Curriculum Requirements

- Written Plan of Goals, Budget, Class Info, Social Activities, Community Based Instruction field trips (eating at restaurants should be limited to 1-2 times a month)
- Facilitators/teachers are responsible for documenting Community Based Instruction (CBI) activities and reflect the basis of each CBI.
- Teachers and facilitators are asked to **submit four to six photos and a summary** of the CBI to the HDS Foundation within **72 hours of the outing**. Summaries should include the corresponding **B.R.I.D.G.E.S. Goals that align** with the activities shown in the images. **These pictures should highlight what the students are learning and practicing during the CBI.** One of the photos should feature the whole class together at the CBI. This is a great opportunity to delegate the task to students in the class, helping them to engage them in the process and offering them extra credit.

- Students are strongly encouraged to be part of a social activities group outside of their classroom setting to engage in a more inclusive and generalized environment which supports greater peer learning opportunities. Some examples of this can be a School Club, Drama, Chorus/Music Member, Sports Team, Religious groups, The Friendship Journey, Social Cog, Best Buddies, etc.
- At least one Class Fundraiser, Community Outreach Activities, or Student Led Enterprise.
- 10-12 Community Based Instruction or social activities (see examples)

III. Program Requirements

- Facilitators and teachers are responsible for distributing and collecting a completed HDS Foundation Photo & Video Release Form for each student before the first Community Based Instruction activity. The Program Manager will collect the forms.
- Students are required to have a Photo and Video Release form signed by their parents or legal guardian. Without a signed release, they will not be permitted to participate in Community Based Instruction or HDS Foundation events outside of school. The release is solely for promoting the B.R.I.D.G.E.S. Program, allowing families to see their child's experiences. Photos and videos may be shared on our social media platforms, but school name and student's last names will not be posted.
- To ensure a comprehensive evaluation of student progress in the B.R.I.D.G.E.S. program, teachers must collect **both a Pre-Assessment (beginning of the school year) and a Final Assessment (end of the school year) from the following three perspectives:**

- **Student Assessment** – completed by each participating student
- **Teacher Assessment** – completed by the classroom teacher
- **Parent/Guardian Assessment** – completed by the student's parent or guardian

Pre-Assessments are due no later than October 15th.

Final Assessments must be submitted with the Final Grant Report on June 15th.

Together, these assessments provide a complete picture of student growth, skill development, and program impact throughout the school year.

- The teachers must provide an **email and phone number database of the parent(s)** for all students attending the class by **September 15th**. The purpose of this list will be strictly to provide parents with additional resources and activities as they come up and not be shared with any third party. (Note: The HDS Foundation and the B.R.I.D.G.E.S. Grant program require a certain amount of parental involvement for specific activities, which should be discussed with school administration during the student selection process).
- A mid-year assessment will be conducted in person or online with an HDS Foundation Program Manager to review key aspects of the B.R.I.D.G.E.S. Program. Teachers will receive the assessment five days before the meeting and must complete and return it to the Program Manager at least two days prior to the scheduled date. During the review, the following key areas will be addressed:
 - Program Implementation
 - Student Impact

- Challenges and Solutions
 - Teacher and Staff Support
 - Student Progress Assessment
 - Community Engagement
 - Parental Perspectives
 - Looking Ahead
- The final report encompasses details on student graduating or aging out, post-secondary plans, including college, trade school, or employment. It also highlights student achievements, challenges encountered, and other key insights that support the HDS Foundation in guiding students toward success.
 - Facilitators/Teachers will submit the following by **June 15th**:
 - Final Report
 - End of year financials
 - End of Year Student Assessment completed by students, teachers & parents

IV. End of School Year

- The school must complete a final report. This report will allow us to evaluate the success of the Program, learn from the classroom experiences and teacher input and enable HDS Foundation to improve future Grant Opportunities.
- The school must create a final budget report, including expenditures for the year. We expect that the Grant Funds will be used fully during the academic year. Once the budget ledger is provided, the HDS Foundation reserves the right to request a refund or apply left over funds towards next year's grant if the recipient applies and is awarded for the upcoming school year. No funds can go to the school at large for any purpose.

VI. Timeline Requirements

June 15th-Final Report & Budget

June 30th- B.R.I.D.G.E.S. Grant Application Due

September 15th- Database of parents' email/phone numbers

January-Mid Year Assessment (Teachers & HDS Foundation Program Manager)

BRIDGES Program Testimonials

Kate Gilson-Miranda, B.R.I.D.G.E.S. Alumni: "As a B.R.I.D.G.E.S. Alumni, there are many things I would like to say about the program. It has helped me with daily life skills, such as

opening a bank account and learning how to budget. Now as I get to see the current students in the B.R.I.D.G.E.S. Program, I get to see the tremendous growth they make throughout the year using the life skills that they are taught."

Kathy Gorman-Gard, Speech Language Pathologist/Facilitator: "Most of the students showed tremendous progress with socializing within the classroom environment and during CBI activities. The highlight of the year was The Prom which seniors and their guests attended. The parents were also pleased to see their children attending their Senior Prom. As their instructors, the planning and coordination took a lot of effort, but it was worth it to see their enjoyment. The students created Vision Boards again this year which opened discussions regarding future employment. This allowed for the students to speak with a wide variety of Guest speakers (in person and virtual) who discussed their career choices and what requirements were needed to reach their goals. These speakers were a big hit. We are so grateful that the grant gives us the ability to give these opportunities to our students."

Contacts and other information

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Sample Community Based Instruction

We have provided a list of options for community-based instruction and activities throughout the year to apply learned skills and offer positive social opportunities. We have also included virtual or web-based activities and resources that can be used as transitional methods to carry out CBI goals.

VIRTUAL RESOURCES

CBI in A Box

- **Birdhouse-** <https://www.hobbylobby.com/crafts-hobbies/wood-crafts-blank-surfaces/birdhouses/wood-birdhouse-kit/p/24517>
- **Soccer Game Kit-** www.homedepot.com/p/Soccer-Game-Kit-Pack-91134P/314022968
- **Gardening: Planting an Herb Garden-** <https://www.amazon.com/Herb-Window-Garden-Kit->

Virtual CBI (can be adapted to In Person)

- **Police Department**
www.bing.com/videos/search?q=virtual+field+trip+police+station&docid=608049906106304299&mid=C2E1FD6D67C6D3457664C2E1FD6D67C6D3457664&view=detail&FORM=VIRE
- **Fitness: 8 Minute Workout for Teens (No Equipment)**
www.youtube.com/watch?v=ixjdNUtWN-Y
- **Guided meditation for Autism** www.youtube.com/watch?v=d1cbGCHuUe0
www.youtube.com/watch?v=w_bmCKMrLYs

Shopping

- **Target:** www.youtube.com/watch?v=0TtAsO_FQmE
- **Walgreens:** www.youtube.com/watch?v=a-E2Mt-4TEg
- **Old Navy:** coachspiegel.weebly.com/virtual-cbi-sites.html
- **Krogers Grocery Store:** coachspiegel.weebly.com/virtual-cbi-sites.html

Museums

- **Tropical Reef Aquarium:** explore.org/livecams/oceans/pacific-aquarium-tropical-reef-camera
- **National Aquarium:** samuraivirtualtours.com/example/nab/index.html

- **Discovery Education:** discoveryeducation.com/community/virtual-field-trips/
- **San Diego Zoo:** zoo.sandiegozoo.org
- **Magic Kingdom:** www.youtube.com/watch?v=f4fVYfNrCM0
- **Universal Studios:** www.youtube.com/watch?v=eXKo7z0A8QI
- **Accessible Chef:** accessiblechef.com/recipes/

Lunch Social (Order lunch online)

- Texas Roadhouse Grill
- Publix-Make your own sub
- Panera
- Wings in Weston
- Outback
- Olive Garden

Guest Speakers Virtually/Face to Face

- HDS Software Tour/Special Guests
- Fire Department/BSO
- YMCA
- Mental Health Professional Support

Family Network on Disabilities Presentations

- Mad Job Skills Series
- Social Networking Dos and Don'ts
- Dating 101: Healthy and Safe Dating Practices
- Cyber Safety
- Personal Hygiene: Dental and Skin Care
- Personal Hygiene: How to Shower
- Choosing a Doctor as a Young Adult: Making your own appointments

Group Activities

- Kindness Rocks
- Tile Designs

Careers

- **CareerOne Stop:** www.careeronestop.org/Videos/CareerVideos/career-videos.asp
- **Ohio Means Jobs:** jobseeker.ohiomeansjobs.monster.com/
- **My Next Move:** www.mynextmove.org/

Other (DADE/BROWARD COUNTY)

- **The Friendship Journey**-Virtual Hangouts/Camp Wings of Change
- **Homecoming Game Spirit party and luncheon**- socialization with inclusion.
- **Halloween Party**- Luncheon or afternoon activity- socialization, budgeting, costume planning, and selection.
- **Home Depot**- Teamwork, budgeting, tax, planning.
- **Publix**- teamwork, problem-solving, budgeting, tax, and accessing store personnel.
- **Holiday Party**- budgeting, meal planning, tax, tips, and social skills.
- **Miami Dade Bus**- trip to park and ride or straight from school to U.S. Post Office.
- **U.S. Post Office**- putting together a package, addressing a package or envelope, time management (hours and bus/C.B.I. consideration) Interacting with personnel, and learning about the postal system and job opportunities.
- **Texas Roadhouse**- socializing, interacting with restaurant personnel, problem-solving.
- **Walmart**- Budgeting challenge, teamwork, socializing, learning appropriate clothing wear for job interviews, learning about job opportunities at Walmart.
- **Chilis Holiday Party**- socializing, interacting with restaurant personnel, problem-solving, understanding tipping.
- **Prom Party**- Socialization, Planning, Interaction with like peers.
- **Ice Cream Social with typical peers**- Socializing, demonstrating appropriate body language.
- **Bank of America** –using deposit slips, A.T.M. machines, interacting with bank personnel, problem- solving.
- **Panera**- socializing, interacting with restaurant personnel, and problem-solving.
- **Olive Garden**- socializing, interacting with restaurant personnel, problem-solving, and understanding tipping.
- **Outback**- socializing, interacting with restaurant personnel, and problem-solving.
- **Peace Mound Park**- Scavenger hunt - socializing, teamwork, and problem-solving.
- **Amelia Earhart Park**- Teamwork, socializing and problem-solving.
- **Vista View Park** – team building – teamwork, socializing, and problem-solving.
- **Fire Rescue** – following directions, asking appropriate questions, and demonstrating appropriate body language.
- **Police Station.** - following directions, asking appropriate questions, and demonstrating appropriate body language.
- **Weston Regional Park** – team building - teamwork, socializing, problem-solving, and following directions.

- **City Hall** - following directions, asking appropriate questions, and demonstrating appropriate body language.
- **Y.M.C.A.** - following directions, asking appropriate questions, demonstrating appropriate body language.
- **Walgreens**- interacting with store personnel, problem-solving, appropriately using A.T.M. card.
- **Lucille's Diner** - socializing, interacting with restaurant personnel, problem-solving, and understanding tipping.
- **Japan Inn**- socializing, interacting with restaurant personnel, problem-solving, and understanding tipping.
- **Scavenger Hunt at school.** - socializing, teamwork, and problem-solving.