

The Rookery

City of Gustavus Endowment Grant

10/26/24

I. Project Summary

Total amount requested: \$15,300

The Gustavus Children's Enhancement Program (dba The Rookery) has reopened our doors! Currently we are operating as a learning center, with the goal of once again becoming a licensed child care provider for the town of Gustavus. Our intention is to complete this process during the 2025 calendar year, as child care is a vital community need that has gone unfilled since we shut our doors in early 2020. Given the fundamental value of childcare for the community and its young families, we are approaching the Gustavus City Council with an unusual request: to fund the substantial work needed to complete the licensing process. Once licensed, we will be able to offer a safe, exploratory, play-based program that will get our littlest Gustavians off to a strong start in life.

We are well aware that the Endowment Grant typically does not fund staff time, as this is understood to be part of an organization's operating budget. We therefore wish to begin by clarifying for the Council that any funds distributed to the Rookery for this purpose would be tracked and accounted for separately. We are able to separate out the hours that a yet-to-be-hired administrator would spend working on this project. Indeed, we could feasibly hire that individual as a contractor if it would render us eligible for this grant.

Before this application is tossed out as "ineligible," we want to argue that funding the child care licensing process for the Rookery meets both the express intent and technicalities of the Endowment Grant program. It is a completely discrete project with a start and end date. Once completed, it will enable us to provide a service that benefits both our young families and the community as a whole. And though it may require some maintenance in the future, the same can be said of any number of capital projects this grant has financed in the past.

If, however, the committee does find the above purpose to be ineligible, we hope you will consider funding another priority: the purchase of a safe, reliable, passenger van that can open up the wonderful learning opportunities present in this community to the children the Rookery serves. We are fortunate to have a new home base at the old clinic building, but our vision for education exhorts us to bring children to playgrounds and beaches, forests and berry patches. As we serve children of many ages, a

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passenger van would dramatically improve the quality of our programming even if we have to defer the child care goal a few more months till funding is secured.

II. Organizational Overview

Contact information: laura@gustavusrookery.org, 317.294.6329
Gustavus Children's Enhancement Program EIN: 32-0205731

The Rookery – formerly both the licensed child care center and preschool for the Gustavus community – is just reopening its doors after a prolonged closure. During the closure, the organization sadly lost its programming, its building, and many of its key staff and board members. The fact that we're not starting quite from square one is thanks in large part to the persistence of a couple key board members and, crucially, the generous transfer of the old clinic building into the Rookery's hands. With renovations now complete, the Rookery is able to provide a safe, dry indoor space as a launching pad to our outdoor programming, alternative schooling, homeschool support, child care, and so much more!

At the time of writing, however, the Rookery is only able to operate within the bounds of the state of Alaska's Child Care Programming Office's exemptions, which limits our ability to provide both child care and alternative educational experiences to Gustavus' children. Chatham School District took over the preschool program during the pandemic, but is no longer offering the program. The Rookery cannot provide either child care nor educational programming for children under "school age" without negotiating the CCPO exemptions, which will become significantly limiting as our 11 new babies become ready to branch out and explore the world. We will be able to accommodate more families once the significant licensing hurdles are surmounted.

But that doesn't mean our work has stopped! We are offering enrichment opportunities for Gustavus school children on the learning center model. These programs, currently offered on a limited basis, are open to both Gustavus School students and the children of homeschooling families. Should the child care licensing purpose be deemed ineligible for this grant, our next top priority - the acquisition of a passenger van - would immediately allow us to expand the scope and quality of the programs we *can* run. Those programs might include a field trip to pick wild strawberries, bring them back, and make jam. A fishing expedition to the Salmon River. A nature walk on the Nagoonberry Loop Trail.

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The vision that unites the current learning center program and the forthcoming child care program is one that, we hope, will resonate in the hearts of many Gustavians. That is: a model of education that is place-based and community centered, where children get their hands dirty, spend lots of time outside, learn from their elders around the community, grow in virtue and good character, and acquire the skills (be it gardening, berry-picking, or caring for chickens) that make life in rural Alaska so sweet.

The current board is all united behind that vision. Our membership consists of Kelly McLaughlin, President; Deirdre Summers, Secretary; and Laura Marcus, Director. We are currently carefully seeking one or two more board members, with the goal of long term commitment, and functional working relationships . Kelly and Deirdre bring a wealth of experience as longtime Gustavians, Rookery board members, and homeschooling parents. Laura, while new to the Rookery board, is an old hand at nonprofit management and experiential education, having co-founded and co-directed Tidelines Institute these last ten years. If successful, we believe this grant will allow us to add our most needed team member of all: the person with the skills and time necessary to lead us through the licensing process. It is true that this person has yet to be determined. But in large part that is because we have not had the resources to make such a person an attractive offer. This grant, if awarded, will fix that problem.

III. Project Description

A. Problem Statement

Meeting the needs of Gustavus families and young ones

At present, the City of Gustavus lacks any structured childcare or consistent alternative and extra-curricular activities, and offers minimally no support for our consistently larger than average homeschool population. While there is some chance that Chatham School District will regain funding for the preschool program, this style of education is not for everyone, and there is no likelihood that parents of children under 3 years will have a safe, nurturing place to send their young ones any time soon. The need for such a place is dire. Within the last 18 months, around ten babies have been born to families in the Gustavus community, significantly expanding the crew of under-threes already present in town. The recent baby boom is a powerful wakeup call for this community. Many of those youngsters are quickly becoming toddlers in need of socialization, exploration, and enrichment. No such venue currently exists.

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Sustainable economic development

Quality child care is an asset that goes to benefit *everyone*, not just the children and families who make use of it. Child care enables primary caregivers to hold down jobs, pursue careers, and undertake other kinds of meaningful work in the community. Of the young ones born in the recent baby boom, most of their parents are employed, either full- or part-time, at entities around town. The author of this grant is one of them!

The lack of reliable childcare makes it next to impossible for primary caregivers to hold down a job at all, let alone a full-time one. Even those with family they can rely upon find themselves juggling schedules on a day-to-day basis with little predictability. Those *without* extended family networks fare even worse. I know of at least one expecting couple who left town in part because of lack of childcare options; both parents wish to pursue careers, but could not see a way forward in Gustavus while also raising a family. Consequently, this city lost substantial young talent that could otherwise have contributed significantly to our economy and community life.

B. Community Benefit

Meeting the needs of Gustavus families, young ones, and the community

With a license in hand, the Rookery could soon provide a rich educational environment, unique to our Gustavus way of life to the Gustavus community: not just for the under-3 crowd, but for preschool- and school-aged children as well. This will provide an obvious benefit to the families in Gustavus, whether they have kids at home, kids at school, kids in homeschooling programs, and the community at large! Whether the city chooses to fund our licensure pathway or a passenger van, either would support the Rookery's vision: to be a place that truly enhances the lives of all Gustavians, providing avenues for skill-building, character-building, socialization, and play that is consonant with life in rural Alaska. Such a program would be an obvious benefit to the children in attendance and their families.. By funding this grant request, the City Council could make it possible for us to provide not just this essential service, but so much more that nourishes the hearts, hands, and heads of our small town.

Sustainable economic development

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Numerous studies point to the significant economic consequences of the child care shortages plaguing the country. Gustavus is no exception. A licensed child care center would remove significant stress from the lives of many families who scramble each day to provide care for their children while also working full- or part-time jobs. Child care would make it easier for primary caregivers to transition back into employment when and if they choose to, and would make putting down roots in Gustavus an easier choice for young couples seeking to start families. Both are key to a sustainable local economy.

C. Link to City's Goals

Meeting the needs of Gustavus families and young ones

This proposal directly addresses Value B, Goals (5), and (6) as written in the city's Strategic Plan. These include: "Support[ing] quality schooling for youth that develops excellent thinking and social skills;" and "Provid[ing] opportunities and activities that prepare youth for life outside of Gustavus while encouraging appreciation of the natural and social environment here."

Quality of life begins in the cradle. The Rookery plans to offer a mostly play-based experience for the youngest, one that is wholly appropriate to the development of children that age, and certainly will "encourage appreciation of the natural and social environment here." Both the licensing or the passenger van would enable us to better expose young people to the natural and social environment. For older children, our programming will continue to grow critical, independent thinking skills, stemming from a firm foundation in a strong sense of self, virtue, and community; , both for those who are eager to explore lives outside of Gustavus and those who are eager to stay.

Sustainable Economic Development

This proposal also addresses Value B, Goal 1 from the city's Strategic Plan: promot[ing] economic well-being for everyone. Surely "everyone" includes our town's many working families! But even for those who don't have children, cultivating thoughtful, caring, community minded residents is indeed a boon for everyone. Child care can benefit the many local businesses and organizations that have to deal with turnover each year when one or more employees leaves to take parental leave. It will benefit the other employees of those businesses, who have to pick up the slack when colleagues leave and transitions take place. And generally, by building community, improving local education, and providing additional work opportunities for locals, the positive effects of

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licensed child care or the passenger van will ripple outwards from the cohort it immediately serves.

IV. Project Goals & Objectives

For the purposes of this grant, there are both immediate, tangible goals – mostly having to do with the acquisition of the child care license – and loftier, more comprehensive goals having to do with the provision of excellent, affordable programming for Gustavus youth. It is crucial to note, however, that this grant itself will *not* be used for program operations. It is purely to support the substantial time and costs associated with the licensing process alone.

Should we be successful in attaining this grant, we will immediately put out a hiring notice for a new Administrator position at the Rookery. This individual would be responsible for both the licensing process itself and coordinating both ongoing programming and programming subsequent to a successful licensing application. These two job functions will have their hours tracked separately, to ensure that grant funds go to the licensing work alone. We hope to hire within one month of posting the job announcement.

When hiring is complete, we anticipate that our new administrator may need to first complete a Child Development Associate (CDA) class. This is the most basic credential required of an Administrator of a licensed child care center. While there are a handful of Gustavians who possess that level of certification or higher, none to our knowledge are available or interested in this position. We are therefore including in our budget the very reasonable cost associated with receiving this credential (\$300). On a part time basis, the course would take eight weeks to complete.

Following the CDA course, the licensing process will take the new Administrator approximately 500 hours. This is the number we reached in conversations with Erin Ohlson, who steered the Rookery through its first successful licensing application. The exact timeline for this process will depend on the flexibility of the Administrator – whose role will not immediately be full time – but seems very feasible within one calendar year. In an ideal situation, we would hope to have our license in hand by fall 2025 in time for child care programming to begin around the time school starts. At the latest, we would expect this programming to begin in January 2026.

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Once again, if the city is interested in supporting the Rookery in this grant cycle but finds the licensing request to be ineligible, a similar amount of funding would put a quality, used passenger van within reach for us. The timeline for that purchase would simply be “as soon as possible!”

MILESTONE	DATE	FUNDING REQ'D	MEASURING SUCCESS
Hiring notice circulated to community	12/31/24	n/a	Hiring notice is visible around the community (virtually and in-person)
New Administrator is hired	2/1/25	n/a	Onboarding process is completed smoothly
Administrator completes online CDA course	4/1/25	\$800	CDA course is passed successfully
Licensing process is completed	12/31/25	\$15,000	The Rookery is a licensed child care center!
Child care center programming begins	1/15/25	n/a	Programming begins for Gustavus children

V. Budget

A. Narrative

The Rookery is currently trapped in the chicken-and-egg situation that bedevils so many small educational nonprofits: we can't bring in revenue until we've surmounted our licensing hurdles, but we can't pay for the costs associated with licensing until we have some revenue! This is where grant funding typically comes in. Yet for many grant programs, including this one, it's not exactly clear whether this vital project falls within the scope of the grant. We hope very much that we have demonstrated the discrete, one-time nature of this project, as well as its absolutely pivotal consequences. If a building is a durable physical structure that allows operations to happen within, then we hope you will consider child care licensing to be the analogous durable administrative structure.

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For the significant work that it takes to license a new facility, we propose paying the Administrator \$30/hour. This will be competitive with compensation rates offered by other local nonprofits, and such an incentive will be necessary to attract the right applicants. Assuming licensing takes 500 hours as we expect, the total cost for the licensing process will come to \$15,000.

To this we are adding \$300 to the budget to cover the cost of CDA licensing. Thread – Alaska’s child care resource and referral organization – provides grants of up to \$500 to put towards new CDA licenses, and we will be applying for one of these for our new administrator. \$300 from the city would make up the difference for this \$800 course.

Among other matching opportunities, we are also seeking funding for licensing through the Alaska Community Foundation Strengthening Organizations grant. However, as with the Endowment Grant, it is fairly ambiguous whether this project meets the criteria for the opportunity. Additionally, we have already been advised that the Strengthening Organizations grant is extremely competitive, regularly receiving requests for 10-15 times the amount of funds available for each cycle. So, we aren’t getting our hopes up. Even if we are successful, this particular opportunity maxes out at \$10,000, leaving us still more than \$5,000 short of our goal.

For the passenger van opportunity, if that is what the city prefers to fund, \$15,000 should put us in a decent position to find a solid, safe, used vehicle, either in Gustavus, Juneau, or another ferry-connected community. That number is based on a recent perusal of options listed on Facebook and Craigslist.

B. Partial Funding

If the city only partially funded this grant, we would do our best to seek funds elsewhere. Since grant opportunities are scarce for this sort of work, our next approach (besides waiting for the results of the ACF grant mentioned above) would be to undertake fundraising work within the community. This we are doing, and will continue to do anyway to furnish the funds that will pay for the remainder of the Administrator’s work (i.e. work that is not involved with the licensing process) as well as to support our general fund. However, if we are unsuccessful in this grant application, the burden of fundraising will be significantly increased for the Rookery board... all of whose members are precisely the kind of working parents who most need the services we hope to be able to provide! One way or another, we are committed to making the licensing process happen. Gustavus simply cannot afford to be wholly without child care.

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Should the city choose to support the passenger van proposal, but only at a partial level, our next step would be to approach the Rasmuson Foundation to add their support to that project.

C. Budget Detail

EXPENSES

ITEM	COST	AMOUNT REQUESTED FROM CITY
Online CDA certification	\$800	\$300
Cost of licensing process (500 of work at \$30/hr)	\$15,000	\$15,000
TOTAL	\$15,800	\$15,300

OR

ITEM	COST	AMOUNT REQUESTED FROM CITY
Passenger Van	\$15,000	\$15,000

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OTHER SOURCES OF FUNDING

ITEM	COST	STATUS
Thread grant for CDA license	\$500	PENDING
Alaska Community Foundation Strengthening Organizations Grant	\$10,000	PENDING

OR

ITEM	COST	STATUS
Rasmuson Foundation	\$15,000	PENDING