

HEALTHY START 2022: INCREASING ACCESS TO QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION

Applications due: Friday, April 8, 2022, 1 p.m. Central Time

INTRODUCTION

The Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota Foundation's mission is to make a healthy difference in communities by advancing health equity and improving the conditions where people live, learn, work and play.

This funding opportunity is focused on quality early childhood care and education. The connection between education and health is well established, with research showing that what happens in the first five years of life closely correlates with lifelong health outcomes and health care expenses.

It is also well-established that structural racism deeply impacts all social determinants of health. That's why Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota has joined local organizations and municipal and county governments in declaring that racism is a public health crisis.

Snapshot of Early Education and Care in Minnesota

- In 2020, more than 345,000 children under the age of 5 lived in Minnesota, comprising 6 percent of the total population.
- Most (75 percent) of these children have parents in the workforce and two-thirds are in some type of ongoing child care.
- At least 35,000 low-income children under age 5 lack access to quality early childhood care and education.
- Rural Minnesota is particularly burdened with extensive child care deserts (geographic areas where there are few, if any, options for quality early childhood care).
- Children aged 4 and under are the most diverse segment of our population, with 32 percent identifying as Black, Indigenous, Latine, Asian Pacific Islander or other community of color, compared to 6 percent of residents aged 65 or older.
- Minnesota doesn't offer universal early education, defined as eligibility for all children to enroll regardless of income level.

Structural racism impacts both access to and quality of early childhood care and education. Cost, underfunding of state programs, program requirements and the structure of child care disproportionately prevent children of color and Indigenous children from accessing high-quality early childhood care and education.

Funding Opportunity Focus

Our goal is increasing access to and quality of early childhood care and education. To achieve this, we'll fund nonprofit organizations, fiscally sponsored groups and Tribal Nations across the state of Minnesota working to eliminate structural, racial and health inequities that impede access to and quality of early childhood care and education. We'll prioritize organizations that are led by people who identify as Black, Indigenous, Latine, Asian Pacific Islander and other people of color, and organizations that promote leadership and decision making by the people most impacted by structural racism.

The field of early childhood care and education is complex and dynamic. Our focus within this complex landscape is on investing in efforts that support child care providers, as outlined in our Provider Supports Strategy Menu. Projects should address structural inequities impacting early childhood providers at the societal, community/organizational or individual level. Examples include, but are not limited to, supporting cross-system/community partnerships and collaborations; supporting culturally and geographically specific child care organizations with organizational development, professional development and infrastructure; and providing coaching, training or tools focused on quality care and self-care.

ELIGIBILITY

The Foundation believes racial and health equity is best achieved when the people experiencing inequities are meaningfully involved in setting priorities, generating solutions, and implementing approaches. This grant opportunity seeks to fund organizations that demonstrate how the populations affected by inequitable access to quality early childhood care and education are meaningfully engaged in all aspects of the proposed work.

The Foundation welcomes applications that implement, continue, or expand proven approaches — and those that develop and implement new models. Both new and existing efforts are eligible. **Each organization may submit only one application for this funding opportunity.** Fiscal sponsors may apply on behalf of other projects, as well as on behalf of their own project.

Eligible organizations

- An organization classified by the Internal Revenue Service as a tax-exempt, nonprofit 501(c)(3) community-based organization located in, or serving, Minnesota communities
- Tribal Nations
- The use of fiscal sponsors is permitted. *If you plan to use a fiscal sponsor, [click here](#) for instructions.*

Ineligible organizations

- Individuals
- For-profit organizations
- Private foundations
- Government agencies and units of government (with the exception of Tribal Nations)
- Public schools, cities, counties and state agencies (They are considered units of government.)
- Organizations that discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, gender, national origin, citizenship status, age, disability, sexual orientation or veteran status
- Organizations that require membership in certain religions or advance a particular religious faith. (Faith-based organizations are eligible if they welcome and serve all members of the community, regardless of religious belief, and have 501(c)(3) status.)

APPLICATION PROCESS AND PREPARING YOUR APPLICATION

The application process has three steps:

- 1. Eligibility questionnaire.** All applicants must complete an eligibility questionnaire at the start of the application process in the Foundation's [online grant-management system](#). Upon completing the eligibility questionnaire, applicants will either (1) be allowed to proceed with the full application, or (2) receive a message that their organization is not eligible to apply for this funding opportunity.
- 2. Full application.** Applications will be accepted until 1 p.m. Central Time, Friday, April 8, 2022. Applications must be completed through the Foundation's [online grant-management system](#). No other form or method of submission will be accepted.
- 3. Site visit.** Site visits will be scheduled only with applicants that are selected as finalists.

Application questions and scoring

The chart below lists the application questions and highlights specific information you should include in your answers. Your application will be evaluated on the responses you provide. The Foundation will also consider information provided on budget documents and the geographic distribution of grants.

Application question	Be sure to	Points
Please provide a two- to three-sentence summary of your application.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be concise and concrete. 	No points
Describe the opportunities and challenges your application addresses and your proposed solution.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe the opportunities and challenges regarding access to and/or quality of early childhood care and education. 	5
How was the focus determined, and who was involved in that decision-making process?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include the population your proposed work is intended to benefit. • How did you involve impacted communities to determine the focus of your project? • How will they be involved throughout the grant period? 	10
Describe your organization's capacity and relevant expertise.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include your organization's experience and cultural competency to work with the population(s) benefiting from your project. • Describe how your organization is putting equity into practice. Do you have a plan or statement on equity? How is your team deepening its equity skills? 	10
Describe your goals and objectives for this project.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe how the proposed goals and objectives will address systemic barriers of access to and quality of early childhood care and education. 	5
Describe the specific activities for which you seek funding and who will carry out the activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include your key activities and how they will achieve your goals and objectives. • Who will do this work? 	5
How will this project advance racial and health equity?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include how the proposed effort will address structural inequities in early childhood care and education. • Include how your effort will help change systems (shifting the conditions that hold the problem in place) rather than solely providing direct services. 	10

Application question	Be sure to	Points
Describe how you will evaluate the work. What impact will you have? How will you measure? Who will be involved?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include any metrics and other information you will collect. • How will you use this information? • How will you share your progress with the communities you serve? • What do you anticipate will change as a result of the grant? <p>NOTE: The Foundation is contracting with an external evaluator who will co-create evaluation plans with each funded organization and support data collection toward your project goals. Please submit your initial evaluation ideas.</p>	5
If applicable, describe your strategies for sustaining this effort.		No points
We invite you to provide any additional information here that will help us review your request. (optional)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You may include, for example a description of your partnerships or coalition participation. 	No points
Upload any additional attachments here that will help us review your request. (optional)		No points

Leadership demographics

The Foundation will prioritize funding organizations that are led by the communities most impacted by inequities. Applicants are asked to complete the leadership demographics fields found on their organization’s profile page in our online grant-management system. This information will inform our funding decisions.

Additionally, organizations **led by and serving people who identify as Black, Indigenous, Latine, Asian Pacific Islander and other communities of color** will receive an additional **10 points**. We define this as an organization that self-identifies as having 51% or more of its board of directors or senior staff identified as Black, Indigenous, Latine, Asian Pacific Islander or other communities of color.

PROGRAM TIMELINE

Grant-funded activities are expected to begin on July 1, 2022. Grants awarded for a one-year grant period will conclude on June 30, 2023. Grants awarded for a two-year period will conclude on June 30, 2024.

GRANTEE SUPPORT

The Foundation is committed to our grantees’ long-term success. Throughout the grant cycle, your Foundation program officer will collaborate with you to identify opportunities to support your efforts. We’ll offer opportunities to learn, network and mobilize with other Foundation grantees, as well as individualized consultations to explore your organization’s specific capacity-building needs. The Foundation will partner with funded organizations to identify the best way to stay connected to and support your work.

When grantees attend Foundation activities or convenings, mileage and lodging expenses can be reimbursed for those traveling more than 100 miles round trip. These expenses don't need to be included in the grant project budget. Any in-person gatherings are dependent on public health guidance throughout the grant period.

BUDGET INFORMATION

The Foundation expects to grant a total of up to \$1,100,000 in year one and an additional \$1,100,000 in year two. Applicants may request grants of up to \$100,000 per year and one- or two-year grants (up to \$100,000 each year). Organizations applying for two-year grants may request different amounts each year. Approval for the second year of funding is dependent on demonstrated progress toward goals in the first year. The Foundation typically provides two-year grants, but has no preference related to one- or two-year grants.

Foundation grants cannot exceed 50 percent of the applicant organization's annual budget.

Each applicant must submit a detailed project budget, budget narrative and organizational budget.

You may submit your own budget form or use the Foundation's templates. Applicants invited for a site visit (the finalists) must provide their most recent audit (if audited), or most recent board-approved financials and the most recent IRS Form 990 in advance of the site visit.

Eligible use of funds

- Project staff salaries and benefits
- Project costs, including but not limited to planning, activity costs, project-related equipment and supplies, and other project-related direct costs
- Indirect administrative costs for the grant budget cannot exceed 20 percent. This may include general and organizational costs unrelated to the project for which you're requesting funding, staff development and trainings, payroll processing or auditing costs, liability insurance, rent, utilities, equipment maintenance and indirect department salaries, such as salaries of personnel in human resources or accounting departments

Ineligible use of funds

- Assistance for individuals, including scholarships
- Activities for specific religious purposes
- Clinical quality-improvement activities
- Biomedical research
- Back payroll taxes
- Capital expenditures, including building purchase, remodeling or furnishing of facilities, and vehicle purchases
- Direct health care services, including medical, dental and mental health
- Director and officers' insurance
- Equipment or travel, except as related to project activities
- Endowments, fundraising events or development campaigns
- Legal fees, including the cost of litigation or settlements
- Retiring debt or covering deficits
- Payment of services or benefits reimbursable from other sources

Lobbying restrictions

As required by the Internal Revenue Code, the Foundation will not fund attempts to influence specific pending or proposed legislation, including referenda, local ordinances and resolutions. This prohibition generally includes direct lobbying of legislators and other government officials with respect to specific legislation and mass media advertising campaigns aimed at influencing specific legislation.

PLEASE NOTE: Blue Cross' [Center for Prevention](#) focuses on commercial tobacco use, physical activity and healthy eating; therefore, applications focused primarily on those issues are **not eligible** for funding under this funding opportunity. Learn more about the Center for Prevention [here](#).

TIMELINE

February 8, 2022	Funding opportunity guidelines released on website ; application process opens
Early February 2022	Informational webinar posted on website
February 8–April 8, 2022	Foundation program staff available for questions about this funding opportunity
Friday, April 8, 2022	Application deadline, 1 p.m. Central Time
May 5–6, 2022	Staff schedule site visits with finalists; applicants not receiving a site visit invitation will not continue in the process
Mid-May 2022	Applicants not selected for a site visit are notified by email
May 9–May 20, 2022	Site visits completed
July 1, 2022	Expected start date for grantees
Mid-July 2022	Announcement of grant awards

APPLICATION CHECKLIST

- Online application questions
- Leadership demographic data
- Project budget
- Budget narrative
- Organization budget

FOR MORE INFORMATION

We encourage all applicants to carefully review this document and watch the informational [webinar](#). Please visit our [FAQ page](#) for frequently asked questions, which we will update as questions are submitted. Applicants are also welcome to call or email:

Allison Corrado, Senior Program Officer
Allison.Corrado@bluecrossmnfoundation.org
(651) 662-4613

Claire Chang, Senior Program Officer
Claire.Chang@bluecrossmnfoundation.org
(651) 662-7416

Bilal Alkatout, Senior Program Officer
Bilal.Alkatout@bluecrossmnfoundation.org
(651) 662-2734

For questions about the application process, please contact Operations Manager Janet Jablonske at Janet.Jablonske@bluecrossmnfoundation.org or (651) 662-7417.

GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

Access — Supports that result in families' ability to enroll their children in early childhood care and education programs, including availability of quality early childhood care and education across the state.

Early childhood care and education — Child care programs, both formal/licensed and informal/unlicensed.

Racial equity as an outcome — Race no longer determines one's socioeconomic outcomes; everyone has what they need to thrive regardless of where they live. (*Race Forward*)

Racial equity as a process — Those most impacted by structural racial inequity are meaningfully involved in the creation and implementation of the institutional policies and practices that impact their lives. (*Race Forward*)

Health equity — Attainment of the highest level of health for all people. Achieving health equity requires valuing everyone equally with focused and ongoing societal efforts to address avoidable inequalities, historical and contemporary injustices, which include systemic racism, and the elimination of health and health care disparities. (*Healthy People 2030*)

Systems change — Shifting the conditions that are holding the problem in place. Applications should address how their project fosters systems change rather than solely provides direct services.

Quality — Including, but not limited to, cultural context, parent engagement and promoting kindergarten-readiness practices, such as the Parent Aware program ratings or accreditation.

Young children or children — 0–5 years old.

RESOURCES

[Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota Foundation website](#)

[Child Care Deserts](#)

[Early Childhood Program Access](#)

[Impact of Structural Racism in Early Childhood](#)

[Minnesota Compass: Early Childhood Overview](#)

[Parent Aware Fast Facts](#)

[Rebuilding the Early Care & Education System with Equity at the Center](#)

[Robert Wood Johnson Foundation: Early Childhood Is Critical to Health Equity](#)

[The Waters of Systems Change](#)

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