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Welcome everyone to the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota Foundation's Equitable Access to Healthcare Coverage applicant webinar. My name is Majra Mucić Gibbons and I am a senior program officer with the Blue Cross Foundation, overseeing our Equitable Care and Coverage focus area. I want to first say thank you for taking the time to listen to this pre-recorded, informational webinar. My main purpose is to share the strategy and requirements related to the Equitable Access to Healthcare Coverage funding opportunity. I will also anchor this presentation in an overview of our foundation and our focus on racial and health equity.

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The next few slides will provide a broad overview of basic Foundation information that is central to all of our work including this specific funding opportunity.

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The mission of the Blue Cross Foundation is to build strong community partnerships to advance racial and health equity. To see through our mission, our approach is to support grantee partners, advocate for policies that support healthy generations and provide a comprehensive approach so families, young people and seniors can achieve their healthiest lives.

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We are a statewide, racial and health equity funder. We are based in Minnesota and our Foundation serves communities across the state of Minnesota. All of our \$72 million in assets are dedicated exclusively to improving community health across Minnesota and in 2023, we provided around \$4.6 million in grants to nonprofit organizations around the state.

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I want to spend a little bit of time defining what I mean when we say racial and health equity, because racial and health equity is at the center of our mission statement. The Foundation, for many years, has approached our work through a health equity lens, and over the last few years, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota joined many others in declaring racism a public health crisis. We have also been deepening our focus to center racial equity through our work. It is well established that structural racism deeply impacts the social determinants of health.

We look at racial and health equity both as the outcome that we're trying to achieve, as well as the process through which we do our work. Looking at racial equity as an outcome is where race no longer determines one's socioeconomic outcomes and everyone has what they need to thrive regardless of where they live. And racial equity as a process is where those most impacted by structural racial inequities are meaningfully involved in the creation and the implementation of the institutional policies and practices that impact their lives. We'll talk more about racial and health equity as we get into what it is that we're looking for in applications.

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It is also helpful for you to know the people behind this funding opportunity, so I want to introduce you, very briefly, to our team. In the top row, from left to right, we have Janet Jablonski, our operations manager. If you have any issues at all as you're applying, including using our grants management

system, Janet is the person that you'll want to reach out to next. Next to Janet, we have Carolyn Link, our foundation president.

In the middle row are the Foundation's program officers. Allison Corrado, myself – Majra Mucić Gibbons, and Camila Mercado Michelli. On the bottom row, again from left to right, we have Erica Orton, our evaluation manager, and Katy Schultz, who does our communications work. You may engage with one or more of us through the application process.

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I would also like to recognize our Board of Directors who guide the foundation's work and funding. They are made up of both Blue Cross leadership staff as well as community members and we are very grateful for their work.

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Before we dive into the details of the funding opportunity, let's get grounded in our Foundation's strategic plan. We are currently in the second year of this four-year Strategic Plan, which is guiding our work through the year 2026. The goals of the strategic plan are to work across generations to advance racial and health equity, by focusing our work in three key areas:

Healthy Start is rooted in what we know happens in the first five years of life and how it sets the stage for lifelong health. We are working on quality early childhood programming as that key driver of lifelong health.

Equitable Care and Coverage is vital to the health of Minnesotans of all ages. We are focusing on universal coverage across the state and supporting community solutions to accessing equitable care. We know that delaying care can be devastating, particularly when preventable, or life-threatening conditions are left untreated. The current funding opportunity, Equitable Access to Healthcare Coverage, is part of this body of work.

Finally, Healthy Connections focuses in on how to create safer and more welcoming communities. We know that when people feel safe and welcomed it counters social isolation and creates a sense of belonging. People who are socially connected experience better health outcomes like lower blood pressure and stronger immune systems.

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Now it's time to focus on the current funding opportunity. One document I'll be referencing throughout is our Equitable Access to Healthcare Coverage guidelines. If you haven't already looked at the guidelines, I recommend you pause this webinar and pull those up so you can follow along with me as I reference important pieces throughout them.

For context, in 2023, the overall percentage of uninsured Minnesotans fell to an all-time low of 3.8% however, racial disparities in coverage persist. Data further show that uninsurance rates are greater and racial disparities further exacerbated in counties and ZIP codes with significant levels of social vulnerability. With that in mind, the goals of this funding opportunity are to:

- Increase healthcare coverage among Minnesota communities most impacted by a lack of healthcare access

- Reduce racial disparities in insurance coverage and
- Maintain historic-low overall uninsurance rates in Minnesota.

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I'm going to walk through our funding criteria and highlight some of the key elements we're looking for in our application review, in hopes that will help you think about if this funding opportunity is a good fit for your organization and the work that you do. I'll walk through the individual application questions in just a little bit but wanted to spend a few minutes sharing some of the most important criteria we'll be looking for when reviewing applications, or what we refer to as what differentiates applications that tend to be successful in our funding process. For applications to be considered, they should include:

- The three key activities of outreach, application, and enrollment assistance. When we review funding applications, we'll be looking to see that your effort supports consumers from the first point of outreach through enrollment.
- This work is also complex, and we will therefore fund organizations that utilize MNSure-certified navigators who are trained experts specializing in Medical Assistance and MinnesotaCare enrollment. We will accept and consider applications from navigator organizations that have MNSure navigators on staff. Additionally, in specified areas where MNSure navigators are limited in number or nonexistent, we will consider applications from organizations conducting outreach, application, and enrollment assistance in partnership with a navigator organization outside of that area.
- We will consider applications focused on serving Hennepin, Kandiyohi, Nobles, Ramsey, Rice and/or Stearns counties. This geographic narrowing was informed by an analysis of ZIP code-level social vulnerability, uninsurance rates, uninsurance counts, and ongoing learnings from Minnesota's redetermination process and outcomes.

Additionally, when it comes to racial and health equity, we will be assessing applications on elements including your organization's cultural competency and equity skills, and how your organization and the proposed project demonstrate an understanding of the systemic barriers families experience in access to coverage and clearly describe how the application is working to eliminate those barriers.

The final point here is around deep and meaningful community engagement. The people experiencing inequities should be engaged with your organization and the proposed work. The Foundation will prioritize funding organizations that promote leadership and decision-making by the people most impacted by the proposed effort, and that meaningfully engage the impacted population in all aspects of the proposed work, from idea generation to implementation.

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To be an eligible organization you must be one of three: 1) A tax-exempt, nonprofit organization that is not a private foundation; 2) A tribal nation, or 3) A fiscally sponsored group. We have specific instructions if you're applying using a fiscal sponsor. Take a look at the eligibility section of the guidelines for instructions on applying with a fiscal sponsor. And, for this funding opportunity, you must serve one or more of the specified counties.

One last additional point on eligibility is that each organization may only submit one application for this funding opportunity unless you are also submitting an application as a fiscal sponsor. Then you may submit both your own application and one for the fiscal sponsorship.

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To summarize, this image may help to identify the “sweet spot” of our funding opportunity requirements. Meeting all of these various criteria is really what's going to move an application forward in our process.

You must be an eligible organization which very importantly includes servicing the specified counties. The work you propose to do must center on Equitable Access to Healthcare Coverage through outreach, application, and enrollment assistance. Your application should utilize the services of MNsure-certified navigators, either within your organization or at a partner organization. The work proposed should be designed to advance racial and health equity and, the people experiencing inequities are engaged with your organization and the proposed work.

AND of course, you must complete your whole application. We have a checklist in our guidelines to help you. We also have templates you can use for all of the budget documents. You can feel free to just look at them as an example or submit whatever budget documents you typically use. If your application does not address all of these criteria, it is very unlikely it'll be funded. I recommend you keep this slide handy when you're thinking about what it is that you would submit as part of your application.

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I'm going to take some time to walk through our application process step by step, so the process is clear as you get into it.

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Our application process has three steps. The first is very quick. When you click 'apply now' in our online grants management system, there is a short eligibility questionnaire to make sure that you are eligible for this funding opportunity. The web address to get to our online grants management system is on the slide here if you wanted to take a note of that. It's also linked through our guidelines and it's available on our website.

After you complete the eligibility questionnaire, and it says that you are eligible to submit an application, that second step is completing your full application. I'll repeat that we have made available templates of all the documents we use, including budget documents, which you can reference if you would like. There is additionally a FAQ section on our website that might be useful as you prepare that full application.

The third and last step is scheduled site visits with applicants that are selected as finalists. As a general rule, we tend to only schedule site visits with organizations we are strongly considering funding.

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I'm going to spend a few minutes going over our application questions though I won't read through them one by one. They are in the guidelines and also visible when you log in and get into the application. You'll see all of them listed here on one page, but I'll just highlight a few things. We no longer have word limits on any of our application questions. We do have a suggested word count just to give you a sense of where to aim, but there are no word or character limits.

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Applications Due: June 26, 2024, 1PM Central Time

As you're responding to each question, please make sure you're thinking of the criteria I shared before. As we are scoring applications we'll be looking for how closely aligned your request is to our goals of 1) increasing healthcare coverage among Minnesota communities most impacted by a lack of healthcare access, 2) reducing racial disparities in insurance coverage and 3) maintaining historic-low overall uninsurance rates in Minnesota. We'll be looking that the critical activities of outreach, application and enrollment assistance are accounted for and that MNsure-certified navigators are part of the process. We will also review how you propose to do this by addressing racial and health equity and how meaningfully engaged the impacted population is in all aspects of the proposed work.

I also wanted to share a bit about how we score applications. We have review questions that align to our application questions, as well as one question that asks reviewers to share overall how they would rate the application. I'll also note that an important part of our grant review is assessing the geographic as well as racial and ethnic representation of applications that are moving forward. We aim for diversity and balance in the organizations we fund.

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We plan to grant a total of up to \$700,000 in year one and an additional \$700,000 in year two for these grants. Applicants can request one or two years of funding of up to \$100,000 each year – or \$200,000 in total. You can read more about budget information for this funding opportunity in our guidelines, but I'll cover just a few highlights.

Foundation grants cannot exceed 50% of an applicant organization's total annual revenue, but more typically the foundation does not fund more than 25% of an organization's total budget. So, consider that when you're thinking about what to request in your application.

You must, as I mentioned before, submit a project budget and a project budget narrative. You can use our budget templates, which you can find those on our website to download, or you can use your own budget forms.

Indirect administrative costs can account for up to 20% of your project's budget. These things include, but are not limited to, things like general organizational expenses, payroll processing, costs of audits, liability, insurance, utilities, and things like that.

Some ineligible uses of funding that I will name, and you'll see these in the guidelines as well, include lobbying expenses. We cannot fund lobbying. Activities that are focused on commercial tobacco use and healthy eating, capital expenditures and equipment, and activities that are inherently religious or require membership in a religion are also ineligible.

If you are applying using a fiscal sponsor, I just want to make a note that the organization budget that you submit should be submitted by the fiscal sponsor, not the fiscally sponsored group.

And again, if you have any questions when you're applying whether about fiscal sponsorship or budget documents or anything like that, we're always happy to have you reach out and have a conversation with you.

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We ask all applicants to submit their leadership demographic data. If you are applying through a fiscal sponsor, you should complete the leadership demographic data for the group carrying out the project, not for the fiscal sponsor. We have made a change this year where we no longer ask for detailed data about your senior staff and board, but instead ask you to tell us if the majority of your senior staff or board identify as Black, Indigenous or people of color. In making this change we're aiming for finding the right balance of getting information that informs our decision making as a funder focused on racial and health equity, while limiting administrative burdens on you as the applicant.

We define senior staff as those with responsibility for staff or budget at that organization wide level, but you are able, each organization, to tell us who you consider to be senior staff, as we know that looks different across different organizations. We also have a text box on our application where you can add additional information about your organization's leadership, recognizing again that that looks different for each organization and what the makeup of your organization's leadership looks like.

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Applications are now open now and must be submitted through our grants management system. We don't accept applications in any other way. Again, that link to get to our online application is up on the screen here. We plan to conduct site visits with finalist applications mid-August and intend to make our funding decisions in early September. You can also see information on our timeline in the guidelines.

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If you are interested in talking with someone at the Foundation about this funding opportunity, we encourage you to reach out. Our contact information is listed on the slide here, as well as on our website. We are anticipating a high level of interest in the funding opportunity and we suggest that prior to contacting program officers, you:

- 1) Read the guidelines including application questions, eligibility criteria, FAQ's and other provided materials. We will update the FAQs to reflect any common questions that come in as applications are being prepared.
- 2) You may also find it useful to visit the Equitable Care and Coverage section of the Foundation's website to see what has been previously funded related to coverage specifically.

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Thank you so much for your interest in partnering with us to help us improve the health of Minnesotans. Please don't hesitate to reach out if you have any questions as we are here and happy to have a conversation. Thank you again and take care.