



Catalyst: Something or someone that quickly causes change or action
Grant Guidelines
Updated December 2023
These guidelines will go into effect February 1, 2024.

Grant Program Goals

The Catalyst Fund provides one-time, non-renewable capacity building funding for nonprofits seeking to make a positive impact on health or health care access for people with low-income and residents of Massachusetts who have been economically, socially, or racially marginalized. The grant program is supported by contributions from Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts employees and vendors.

Context

Nonprofit organizations that serve the health and health-related needs of people with low-income and residents of Massachusetts who have been economically, socially, or racially marginalized, often operate with limited resources and capacity to entirely fulfill the needs of community members and staff. As a result, launching new initiatives to strengthen their infrastructure, or taking time to plan for the future, can be a luxury. The Catalyst Fund is intended to help organizations pay for these types of capacity building activities and as its name implies, help spark innovation. As such, the Catalyst Fund does not fund ongoing programmatic expenses, or general operating costs, such as salaries.

Key Program Elements and Eligibility Criteria

The Catalyst Fund provides one-year, non-renewable grant awards up to \$7,500 to Massachusetts community-based and/or grassroots organizations to address a health or health-related component of their work. Grant funds can be used for expenses that support the organization to strengthen their infrastructure, build capacity, or prepare for the future. From hiring a trainer on best practices in trauma-informed or equitable service delivery, to crafting a fundraising plan to make fresh produce freely available to families with low income, and for purchasing technology to support health education outreach to residents who speak languages other than English – these small one-time, fast-turnaround grants can make a lasting and outsized impact on organizations and the clients they serve.

The Foundation will accept applications from community-based organizations, community health centers, and social service organizations, even from those for which health is not a core activity or emphasis, if the proposed work has a compelling connection to health or health care.

The following expenses and activities are ineligible for funding from the Catalyst Fund:

- Ongoing expenses, or general operating funds, including but not limited to:

- Staff salaries
- Recurring expenses, ongoing program costs, or membership dues
- Conference or gala sponsorships
- Capital campaigns
- Medical equipment and associated training (e.g., automated external defibrillators, or AEDs, are not eligible).

Those excluded from consideration for Catalyst Fund grants:

- Nonprofits awarded a Catalyst Fund grant in the previous 24 months *
- Hospitals and hospital affiliated organizations
- Nonprofits incorporated outside of Massachusetts
- Nonprofits that do not primarily serve residents of Massachusetts with low-income and those who have been economically, socially, racially, or ethnically marginalized
- Individuals, for-profit entities, academic institutions, or religious institutions
- Nonprofits with organization budgets over \$5 million

****Organizations that receive a Catalyst Fund award are not eligible again until one year following the end of their grant period and have submitted a final report (i.e., If you received a CF grant for February 2024–February 2025 you are not eligible to apply until again until February 2026 and a final report has been submitted.)***

Why this change? We have been receiving a record number of CF applications and are interested in funding as many different organizations across the Commonwealth as possible.

Considerations

The Foundation aims to support as many organizations as possible; therefore, preference is given to organizations that we have not recently funded. The Foundation recognizes that structural racism is a public health issue and that access to affordable, quality health care is a racial and social justice issue. As such, we are committed to supporting community-based organizations that serve people of color and those that led by people of color as they play a crucial role in bringing about racial justice in health care.

Application Procedures

Applications for a Catalyst Fund grant can be submitted at any time through the Foundation’s [online grantmaking portal](#). Applications deemed complete by the 5th of each month (or the next business day if the 5th falls on a weekend) will be reviewed by a committee later that same month. Applications received after the 5th of the month will be reviewed the following month. Applicants will hear back within 3–6 weeks from their submission date. Foundation staff may contact applicants for clarifying information following receipt of an application.

Please note- we do not review applications in December, July, or August. Applications submitted during those months will be reviewed in January or September, respectively.

Organizations can submit one application per month. Organization cannot receive more than one Catalyst Fund grant within a twenty-four-month period and a final grant report must be submitted before applying for new funding.

Application

Applicants will answer a core set of questions to complete the application process. Associated with each question is a character limit, which includes spaces.

Organizational Demographics Information

The application portal asks for demographic information about your organization. This section is required.

Contact Information

The contact listed is who will receive communications from the Foundation.

Name of organization – please be sure to include the full organization name and to include the legal name if it is different.

Financial Information

Please be sure to note if you have a fiscal sponsor. If not, please enter “N/A” for not applicable.

Narrative

1. Brief Summary of the Request. *(Up to 3,000 characters)*
2. Population of Focus. Describe the population of focus for your work including geographic and demographic characteristics as well as specific racial and ethnic groups. *(Up to 1,000 characters)*
3. Describe your organization’s mission and core activities. *(Up to 1,000 characters)*
4. How will your project address a health or health care issue affecting your client population? Please be as specific as possible. *(Up to 2,000 characters)*
5. Describe how the grant funds will be used. Please be as specific. How will it enhance your organization’s capacity to address an opportunity or problem you seek to address? *(2,000 characters)*
6. If the project budget is more than \$7,500, how do you plan to secure the balance? Have you identified other funders or already have funding commitments? *(1,000 characters)*
7. If your request is to hire a consultant: Please describe the expertise that the consultant will bring to enhance the capacity of your organization and share your plans for identifying and securing the appropriate consultant. *(1,000 characters)*
8. If your request is to purchase technology:
 - a. How does this new technology enhance the capacity of your organization beyond daily functions? What does it enable you to do that you cannot do without it? *(1,000 characters)*
 - b. Is your organization able to support this expense through its existing organizational budget? *(1,000 characters)*

In addition to the application Narrative, applicants must upload the following attachments:

1. Project Budget: A project budget itemizing how the Catalyst Fund grant will be spent if awarded. Please be specific and account for all the funds you are requesting. Please download fill out and attach the project budget template provided by the Foundation in its portal. Please ensure project budgets do not include any of the ineligible expenses listed above.
2. Organizational Budget: A copy of the organization's current operating budget, showing year-to-date planned and actual income and expenses, along with a budget narrative.
3. Tax-Exempt Designation: A current 501(c)(3) IRS tax status documentation letter. If you have a fiscal agent, please attach a copy of that organization's IRS ruling, as well as a brief letter stating their commitment to receive the funds as the fiscal agent.

Applicants will also have the option of uploading an attachment that provides information supplementing the required materials. However, it is encouraged that the most prevalent information relative to your application be included in the Narrative.

Organizations that receive a Catalyst Fund grant must submit a brief final report describing the outcome or impact of the award at the end of the one-year grant period. The Foundation will issue a reminder with a report outline.

For more information, contact Reena Singh, Senior Program Officer by email:
Reena.Singh@bcbsma.com
