



Special Initiatives Grant Guidelines

Updated May 2024

Mission

The mission of the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation is to ensure equitable access to health care for all those in the Commonwealth who are economically, racially, culturally, or socially marginalized.

The Foundation defines health as a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. 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.

Special Initiatives Program Overview: What We Are Interested in Funding

The Special Initiatives grant program provides organizations with a one-time grant of up to \$50,000 to pilot or launch a new project over a one-year period. Special Initiative grants are intended to fund projects which empower communities to advance health equity at the community level. Projects should positively impact the health or health care related needs of those Massachusetts residents who have been economically, socially, culturally, or racially marginalized. It is the hope that, if the project is successful, it can be sustained, scaled, and potentially, replicated.

Special Initiative grant proposals must align with one or more of the Foundation's three focus areas: access to health coverage and care, access to behavioral health services, and elimination of structural racism and racial inequities in health **but does not replicate a current Foundation grant program.**

We encourage applicants to read the Foundation's principles on the website to learn more about our approach and priorities and review the Special Initiatives Frequently Asked Questions for more information.

Proposals should:

- **Clearly describe how the project will advance health equity.**
- Identify a clear project scope and plan that is achievable within the **one-year timeframe** of the grant program; including concrete goals that the organization expects to achieve, ensuring that the goals are **specific, measurable, attainable, and realistic with a clear timeframe.**
- Identify an attainable plan for community engagement and community building (if applicable).

- Identify key partners (if applicable) and specific roles in program implementation and agreements about how partners will work together.

Proposals are accepted and reviewed twice a year (see below for timelines). This grant program does not require a Letter of Inquiry. The Foundation reserves the right to make grant awards in amounts less than \$50,000.

Eligibility

- Organizations with a 501c (3) tax-exempt nonprofit designation from the IRS or operate under the fiscal sponsorship of a tax-exempt nonprofit. The applicant organization must be incorporated in Massachusetts.
- Organizations that primarily serve people who have been socially, economically, culturally, or racially marginalized.
- Organizations proposing projects that align with the mission and focus areas of the Foundation.
- The Foundation is especially interested in funding organizations that are people of color-led and/or whose leadership reflects the demographic composition and lived experiences of the communities they serve.

The following will not be funded:

The Foundation does not accept applications from religious institutions, for-profit institutions, or individuals. Also, the Foundation does not fund proposals to support ongoing operating costs, such as direct medical or clinical care, long-term care, hospice, and palliative care. The Foundation does not fund projects focused on addressing one specific disease or medical condition. The Foundation also will not fund events, conference sponsorships or capital expansion projects.

In addition, the Special Initiatives grant program will not support:

- Expansion or ongoing support of an existing program – this includes taking a proven project to a new location.
- Stand-alone staff training that is not an integral part of the proposed program.
- Marketing and outreach supplies (such as shirts, water bottles) and basic needs items (food, hygiene items, rental assistance).
- **Salaries for new positions with no evidence of sustainability** beyond the grant period.
- Capital expenses (e.g., building materials, vehicles)
- A proposal that replicates a current Foundation grants program.

For examples of successful Special Initiatives applications, please review examples of recently funded organizations on the website.

Deadlines and Submission Requirements

According to the schedule below, applicants must submit full proposals – including budget documents – through the Foundation’s online portal.

The Special Initiatives grant program is competitive, with demand far outpacing the resources available to fund proposals. Please review the eligibility requirements, grant guidelines, Frequently Asked Questions and supporting documents closely to assess your organization’s alignment prior to applying.

*** Current Special Initiatives grant recipients are only eligible to apply for another Special Initiatives grant one year after their grant period and the submission of a final report.** (i.e., If you received a Special Initiative grant for January 2023–January 2024 you are not eligible to apply until again until January 2025 and a final report has been submitted).

Why this change? The Foundation is interested in funding as many different organizations across the Commonwealth as possible so we ask recent grant recipients to wait a year before applying again. .

The proposal narrative and budget documents are below for your reference. This is not the official application. All applications must be submitted via the Foundation’s online grantmaking portal. Using the proposal narrative questions below, we encourage you to develop your proposal in a Word document first to ensure the appropriate number of characters before transferring your final submission to the online portal.

Requirement	Proposal Due Date	Notification of Awards
Submit full proposal through the online portal; No Letter of Inquiry	July 31, 2024	Week of October 15 th , 2024

All proposals are due by 12:00 p.m. on the date of the deadline. Please note there will be no technical support available for the online portal after the noon deadline. Character count limit does include spaces.

Full Proposal Narrative

BCBSMA Foundation Health Equity Definition

Everyone has a fair and just opportunity to attain their ideal health, according to their needs. Advancing health equity is a process of addressing limited access to economic resources, education, housing, etc. When focusing specifically on racial equity in health, advancing health equity means dismantling the systemic racism that underlies differences in the opportunity to be healthy.¹

1. Population of Focus: Who will benefit from and be affected by this project? (1,000 characters)
2. Project Description: What is the proposed project? **Please explain how it will advance health equity in the community your organization serves. Please include the issue(s) the project will address and how it will impact health.** Please include goals that are SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, and realistic given the one-year grant timeframe. This section should also address how you determine the success of the project. (5,000 characters)
3. Project Management: Who are the people that will lead this effort, and what factors most predict their ability to achieve success? (500 characters)

¹ Adapted from Princeton University, “State Health and Value Strategies Internal Health Equity Language Guide.”

4. Community Engagement: What is your community engagement or community building strategy? How has the community been involved in identifying the need for this project? (2,000 characters)
5. Collaboration: Who are the key partners for the proposed project (if applicable), what specific roles will they play in program implementation and, do you have formal or informal agreements in place to support that collaboration? (1,000 characters)
6. Project Follow-Up: **What is your sustainability plan and what funding will you use to support it?** (1000 characters)

Additional Attachments

Organizations will be required to submit the following attachments:

- I. **Project Budget Worksheet**: Utilizing the budget worksheet available on the portal, describe how the funding will be allocated to cover expenses.
- II. **Budget Narrative Template**: The budget narrative should justify the budget. The narrative details must explain how and where the grant funds will be used. If additional funding beyond those requested from the BCBSMA Foundation is required, indicate that on the Project Budget and describe on the Budget Narrative where the additional funding is coming from, whether it is secured, and what proportion of the overall project budget would be supported by the grant from BCBSMA Foundation.

The Foundation will prioritize proposals for projects where BCBSMA Foundation is funding at least 1/3 of the project budget. The Foundation supports collaborative grantmaking and we also believe that it is important to track the specific impact of the Special Initiative grant dollars.

Applicants with questions about whether their proposal meets this threshold are encouraged to contact the Foundation.

- III. **Organization Budget**: Upload your organization's board or department-approved budget for the most recent full year.
- IV. **Tax Exempt Letter**: Upload your organization's letter from the IRS that confirms its tax-exempt status. If you have a fiscal agent, upload the letter from the fiscal agent.

Questions

Applicants are welcome to contact Foundation staff with any questions as they develop their proposals. For proposal development questions, please contact: Jacquie Anderson, Senior Director of Grantmaking Jacquie.Anderson@bcbsma.com

For technical and logistical questions related to accessing the online grantmaking portal, please contact: Evelyn Monteiro, Grants Management Administrator; Evelyn.Monteiro@bcbsma.com

Organization Name:

Grant Program Area:

Grant Period:

*** Foundation will prioritize proposals for projects where the BCSBS MA Foundation is funding at least one-third of the project budget. The Foundation supports collaborative grantmaking and we also believe that it is important to track the specific impact of the Special Initiative grant dollars.*

Personnel	Base Salary	FTEs	Total	BCBSMA Grant	Other** Support
Project Director					
Project Staff					
Administrative Staff:					
Other Staff:					
Fringe Benefits (____%)					
Sub-Total					
Other Direct Costs:					
Office Operations					
Equipment					
Meeting Expenses					
Marketing/Communications/Outreach					
Travel					
Project Space					
Evaluation					
Other:					
Sub-Total					
Purchased Services					
Consultants					
Contracts					
Sub-Total					
Indirect Costs (15% Foundation approved rate)*					
TOTAL					



Budget Narrative Template

An important component of the submission process is the preparation of a budget narrative. The budget narrative should justify the budget. The narrative details must explain how and where the grant funds will be used. Your best judgment should be used when projecting program expenses.

You should:

- Complete all **Categories** and **Sub-categories** in the table shown below and explain how the funds for this line item will be spent.

NOTES:

- If any of the Categories (e.g. Personnel, Other Direct Costs) or Sub-categories (e.g. Other Staff, Travel, Consultants) are not relevant to your budget, you may delete them from the table.
- If additional funding beyond those requested from the BCBSMA Foundation is required, describe on the Budget Narrative where the additional funding is coming from, whether it is secured, and what proportion of the overall project budget would be supported by the grant from BCBSMA Foundation.
- *The Foundation will prioritize proposals for projects where BCBSMA Foundation is funding at least 1/3 of the project budget. The Foundation supports collaborative grantmaking and we also believe that it is important to track the specific impact of the Special Initiative grant dollars.*

Applicants with questions about whether their proposal meets this threshold are encouraged to contact the Foundation.

Category	Narrative
Personnel: list each position and name of individual under the appropriate sub-category, along with base annual salary, FTE (full-time equivalency or percentage of effort), amount requested, and a detailed description of their planned activities related to the project.	
Project Director	
Project Staff	
Administrative Staff	
Other	

Category	Narrative
Category	Narrative
Other Direct Costs: for each category, list the components by item and amount. For Project Space, provide the basis used to calculate the amount requested.	
Office Operations	
Equipment	
Meeting Expenses	
Communications/ Marketing/Outreach	
Travel	
Project Space	
Evaluation	
Other	
Purchased Services	
Consultants	
Contracts	
Additional Funding	