

## REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

### Supporting Grassroots Efforts to Promote Equitable Early Childhood (Prenatal-5) Outcomes

*Note: (\*) denotes a key term defined at the end of the document for shared understanding*

#### About the Foundations

##### The Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina Foundation

The Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina Foundation is an independent, charitable foundation with the mission of improving the health and well-being of everyone in North Carolina. Since our founding in 2000, we have invested more than \$150 million into North Carolina communities through more than 1,100 grants. In our grantmaking, we strive to address the key drivers of health, and we take a flexible approach designed to meet identified needs in partnership with the community. We also work closely with our grantees, and other nonprofits, to support their growth through capacity building, training, and leadership development opportunities. More information is available at [www.bcbsncfoundation.org](http://www.bcbsncfoundation.org).

##### Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust

The mission of the Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust is to improve the health and quality of life of people with low incomes in Forsyth County and around the state, as Mrs. Reynolds stated when she established the Trust. We believe in thriving North Carolina communities and thriving residents, equitable access to health care, and equitable health outcomes. More information is available at [www.kbr.org](http://www.kbr.org).

#### Background

Early experiences and environment have a lasting impact on health, academic achievement and economic stability, setting children up for success in school and life. Unfortunately, COVID-19 is decimating early childhood supports across the state, while subjecting children to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) as families experience social isolation, poverty, and illness. At the same time, North Carolina – like the nation – is reckoning with the profound and pervasive role structural racism\* plays in the health of communities. The confluence of these two factors demands that early childhood stakeholders rethink, reform, and rebuild policies and programs in a way that reflects the post-COVID world and centers racial and ethnic equity.\*

This rebuilding process will only be successful in promoting equitable outcomes for North Carolina's diverse population of children and families if the communities most impacted by inequities are at the center. Local and state-level policymakers, philanthropies, and advocates have too often designed policies and programs without partnering with parents of color, service providers, and community leaders. This lack of authentic inclusion has contributed to persistent disparities in outcomes for Black, Latino, American Indian, and other children and families of color, which is why this funding opportunity is available exclusively to those communities.

## Overview of Funding Opportunity

To address early childhood inequities, the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina Foundation (Blue Cross NC Foundation) and the Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust (the Trust) are issuing a Request for Proposals (RFP) for a three-year, \$100,000 / year (\$300,000 total per organization) flexible funding\* opportunity with the aim of supporting up to 10 organizations to advance changes to early childhood policies, practices, institutions, or other components of early childhood systems (See the appendix for a definition and examples of systems change). Eligible organizations for this funding opportunity are grassroots organizations led by, and serving, Black, Latino, American Indian, and other communities\* that have been negatively impacted by inequities in early childhood systems.

### Overarching Project Goals:

The primary goal of this project is to facilitate system changes\* that lead to greater racial and ethnic equity for young children in North Carolina by:

- Building the advocacy\* capacity of local\* organizations led by, and serving, Black, Latino, American Indian, and other communities\* that have been negatively impacted by inequities in early childhood outcomes.
- Supporting the implementation of local system-change goals to address ACEs, improve early childhood education, and reform practices and policies that perpetuate racism and racial inequities in early childhood.
- Enhancing the power of these organizations to influence state-level policy and program discussions.

### Description of Funded Work:

This funding opportunity will support local organizations and coalitions that are working to address a range of issues that are consistent with the Foundations' early childhood priorities, such as:

- Making high-quality early childhood care and education accessible and affordable in a variety of settings that meet the diverse needs of North Carolina's children, parents, and caregivers.
- Supporting the health and economic well-being of parents and caregivers as a strategy to meet the needs of their children.
- Preventing and mitigating ACEs by supporting the social-emotional health needs of children and parents.
- Other issues facing young children (Foundation staff are available for one-on-one consultations to discuss whether an issue is a fit for this funding opportunity).

The Foundations are committed to listening to, and learning in partnership with, our grantees. Our emergent strategies are continuously informed by these interactions. Based on this approach, we will

not specify the issues that grantees will work on, so long as they are consistent with the Foundations' early childhood priorities (see bulleted list above).

Grantees will work with Foundation staff and technical assistance providers to develop, modify, and implement plans to advance their selected policy or systems-change goals. Examples of strategies and tactics that might be included in grantees' plans include, but are not limited, to:

- Community organizing – employing community forums, neighborhood canvassing, and other outreach strategies to raise awareness and create shared purpose among individuals in the community.
- Coalition building – engaging other local and state-level organizations or businesses to join forces to address a community need.
- Community-driven planning – engaging residents in the process to collect data, identify gaps, and determine best practices to address goals.
- Leadership development– strengthening a community's capacity to address critical issues facing children by training and supporting new leaders.
- Policymaker education – providing policymakers with information about challenges facing young children and potential solutions is an important strategy (please see note on lobbying at the end of the document).

### **Who Should Apply?**

The Blue Cross NC Foundation and the Trust believe that every young child should have the opportunity and resources to be healthy and well-prepared for success in school, work, and life. We seek to partner with organizations that share this vision and embody the following characteristics:

- *Grounded in community* – organizations will be deeply grounded in community as demonstrated by the inclusion of parents, service providers, and others in the organization's decision-making and operations.
- *Engaged in advocacy for systems change* – organizations will have specific goals to advance changes to early childhood policies, practices, institutions, or other components of early childhood systems. Even if an organization isn't a self-described 'advocacy' organization, it could still be a good fit for this funding opportunity if it has a desire to improve policies, practices, and institutions related to early childhood systems.
- *From historically marginalized communities* – organizations will be able to describe racial and/or ethnic inequities in child well-being in their communities, whether urban or rural.
- *Led by and serving Black, Latino, American Indian, and other communities* that have been negatively impacted by inequities in early childhood systems.
- Collaborative applications involving more than one organization are welcome.

Grantees will be part of a cohort that meets regularly to share learnings from the field, to build relationships with each other, and to participate in technical assistance opportunities funded by the Foundations. Grantees will be encouraged to access technical assistance and capacity building\* resources, such as policy and advocacy trainings, research, communications support, fund development support, racial equity trainings, and more. Grantees will have the opportunity to identify which of these resources meet their needs and to help select consultants and nonprofits to provide support.

**Eligibility:**

- Any nonprofit organization that is exempt under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code and is classified as “not a private foundation” under Section 509(a).
- A group or project with a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization acting as a fiscal sponsor.
  - The fiscal sponsor is responsible for all legal aspects of the organization or project.
  - The fiscal sponsor is considered the grantee by the Foundations and agrees to be accountable to the Foundations for the programmatic and financial outcomes of the grant.
- Any federal- or state-recognized tribal governments, tribal organizations, or Native-controlled community organizations with 501(c)(3) nonprofits or fiscal sponsorship.
- There is no minimum organizational budget requirement.

**Grantee Commitments:**

- Participate in cohort activities. Grantees will attend regular calls, virtual meetings, or in-person meetings to share information and to participate in technical assistance sessions.
- Co-create cohort norms (e.g., meeting frequency, meeting ground rules) and describe technical assistance needs for their respective organizations.
- Participate in training about lobbying regulations to ensure grantees have a clear understanding of their ability to implement various advocacy strategies.
- Communicate regularly with the Trust and the Blue Cross NC Foundation.
- Have a long-term commitment to developing organizing and advocacy skills.
- Engage community members and stakeholders, such as parents and child care, health care, and/or other service providers.
- Develop and implement a plan to advance a local or state systems change priority, including specific outcomes for the grant period. We recognize that a single grant may not be sufficient to facilitate structural change during the three-year grant period.
- Participate in learning and evaluation activities. Grantees may be asked to provide qualitative or quantitative data as part of reporting processes, complete surveys, and participate in opportunities to strengthen learning across projects.

**Funder Commitments:**

- Engage in thought partnership with grantees with a focus on listening to grantees for understanding.
- Support grantees to achieve their goals and to adapt to new and perhaps unexpected circumstances.
- Solicit, and be open to, direct, constructive feedback about our approach to, and implementation of, this project and specific opportunities to change course.
- Provide open and regular communication about any changes or updates that might have an impact on grantees.
- Operate in consistency with our shared values: authenticity, collaboration, curiosity, equity, health, and leadership.

## How to Apply

### Part 1:

All prospective grantees will complete an [online Letter of Inquiry \(LOI\)](#) to provide information about the organization and the early childhood issue to be addressed. Eligible organizations must be locally focused and led by, and serving, Black, Latino, American Indian, or other communities that have been negatively impacted by inequities in early childhood systems. LOIs from eligible organizations will be assessed by Foundation staff and external reviewers with particular attention to:

- Statement of work related to early childhood.
  - The applicant’s work to address issues facing young children in their communities.
  - The applicant’s approach to addressing these issues (for this funding opportunity, we are interested in supporting efforts to improve the systems (e.g., child care, housing, mental health, etc.) that support or impact young children and their families. (For a definition and examples of systems-change, see the appendix.)
  - The applicant’s progress thus far in addressing these issues.
- The role played by parents, service providers, and other community members, specifically those served by the organization, in organizational decision-making, strategy development, and the identification of systems-change goals.
- The overall geographic distribution of grantees.

*We strongly encourage all prospective applicants to have a conversation with Foundation staff prior to submitting an LOI. This will help us get to know you and will help you determine if your organization is a potential fit for this funding opportunity.*

*To sign up for a 30-minute conversation, [follow this link](#).*

### Part 2:

Following receipt of the LOIs, the review committee will select a group of finalist organizations to move forward to part two of the process. Finalists will submit additional organizational and financial details and participate in a conversation with Foundation staff to dive more deeply into the organization’s role and capacity, its community context, and the proposed work. Finalists will receive specific questions in advance of these conversations and will be provided with at least two weeks to prepare. Applicants will be notified in mid-May whether their proposal has been approved for funding.

### **Learning:**

We will be evaluating our RFP process to help us understand how we can increase our efficiency and transparency and create a more equitable process moving forward. All applicants will be invited to provide feedback to help us understand the applicant experience and improve our processes. The Blue Cross NC Foundation will provide additional details on opportunities to provide feedback throughout the application process. Providing feedback will be voluntary.

### **Timeline:**

<b>Date(s)</b>	<b>Deadline or Activity</b>
January 7, 2021	RFP release and LOI web form is open
January 12, 2021	Q&A Webinar for prospective applicants
January 13 – February 4, 2021	Foundation staff available for consultation

February 5, 2021	LOI web portal submissions due
February 5 – March 2, 2021	Foundation staff and external partners review LOI submissions
March 5, 2021	Finalists selected and notified
March 22 – April 16, 2021	Finalist interviews
May 2021	Grantees selected and notified

**For More Information:**

On Tuesday, January 12<sup>th</sup> at 2 pm, the Blue Cross NC Foundation and the Trust will hold a webinar to discuss the funding opportunity and answer questions of prospective applicants.

You can register for the webinar [at this link](#).

A recording of the webinar will be posted on the Blue Cross NC Foundation website along with written FAQs.

For questions about this funding initiative, contact Rob Thompson at [rob.thompson@bcbsncfoundation.org](mailto:rob.thompson@bcbsncfoundation.org).

For questions about the LOI submission process, contact Lasindra Webb at [lasindra.webb@bcbsncfoundation.org](mailto:lasindra.webb@bcbsncfoundation.org).

**Appendix: Key Terms**

**Advocacy:** In the context of this RFP, advocacy means making the case for changes to a system related to early childhood. Advocacy can take many forms that are legally permissible for nonprofits, including community organizing, public education, research, litigation, and lobbying (see note below on lobbying). There are no legal limits on how much non-lobbying advocacy a nonprofit organization can undertake.

**Capacity Building:** The process by which individuals, organizations, groups, or communities obtain, improve, and retain skills, knowledge, tools, or other resources to reach self-identified goals and objectives.

**Flexible Funding:** The Foundations will not require submission of a project budget, but will work with grantees to establish specific outcomes for the grant period. The purpose of flexible funding is to provide grantees with maximum budget flexibility to build their organizational capacity to achieve shared goals between the Foundation and the grantee.

**Led by, and serving, Black, Latino, American Indian, and other communities that have been negatively impacted by inequities in early childhood systems:** With regards to this RFP, this means that:

- The executive director or CEO is Black, Latino, American Indian, or identifies as a person of color.
- The community served is primarily Black, Latino, or American Indian as demonstrated by the demographics of those directly impacted by an organization’s programming.
- The staff and board reflect the community served.

**Lobbying:** The IRS defines lobbying as communication with a legislator that expresses a view about specific legislation. Grassroots lobbying is defined as communication with the public that expresses a view about specific legislation and includes a call to action. Nonprofit organizations may legally engage in lobbying activities within certain bounds. All grant recipients will be required to participate in a

training to familiarize them with state and federal rules about lobbying. No grant funding can be earmarked for lobbying.

**Local:** In this RFP, local refers to a definable community that's no larger than a few counties.

**Racial and Ethnic Equity:** Is the condition that would be achieved if one's racial identity no longer predicted, in a statistical sense, how one fares. When we use the term, we are thinking about racial equity as one part of racial justice, and thus we also include work to address root causes of inequities, not just their manifestation. This includes elimination of policies, practices, attitudes and cultural messages that reinforce differential outcomes by race or fail to eliminate them. (Source: W.K. Kellogg Foundation)

**Structural Racism:** Refers to the way public policies, institutional practices, cultural representations, and other social norms interact to generate and reinforce inequities among racial and ethnic groups. (Source: NC Institute of Medicine - *abbreviated*)

**Systems Change:** Can include change to policies, practices, processes, the flow of resources, values, power dynamics, and mindsets. This type of change can occur at multiple levels, and we are open to a variety of approaches to systems change. Below are examples of systems change work from current Foundation grantees. The first two are specific to early childhood, while the last two describe other local systems change efforts not related to early childhood:

- **The Western NC Early Childhood Coalition** is working to strengthen the child care sector in the western part of the state by advocating for increased resources. Specifically, the Coalition is pushing state-level decision-makers – NC DHHS and the state legislators – to modify a funding formula for child care assistance that has resulted in unfair reimbursements for child care providers in western North Carolina.
- **The Pre-K Priority** in Forsyth County is advocating for universal, high quality pre-Kindergarten opportunities for all children. This includes feasibility studies, coalition building, communications, and community organizing.
- **Collaborative Cottage Grove**, a community-based partnership in Greensboro, pushed for investments to improve conditions in the Cottage Grove neighborhood, ultimately leading to the sale and purchase of one of the city's largest affordable housing apartment complexes, with new ownership committed to improving living conditions without displacing current residents. Collaborative Cottage Grove has also successfully advocated for infrastructure improvements including bike lanes, playground equipment, and remediation for a former landfill site.
- **Healthier Highland** is building a culture of healthy eating and active living in the Highland community in Gaston County. Healthier Highland has successfully advocated for more than \$1 million in public infrastructure improvements resulting in a new splash pad, high visibility crosswalks, and new housing, and they have secured a land donation to expand community gardens and create an economic venture staffed by neighborhood youth.