

## Funding Opportunity

# Strengthening Community Capacity to Advocate for Healthy Food

**Issue Date:** September 13, 2023

**Submission Deadline:** October 27, 2023, by 5:00 p.m. ET

**Contact:** [info@bcbsncfoundation.org](mailto:info@bcbsncfoundation.org)

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### SPECIAL NOTES:

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

### Overview

Increasing access to healthy food requires addressing the systemic issues that allow food insecurity to persist, including elevating solutions that integrate the perspective and priorities of communities most impacted by this issue. The purpose of this funding opportunity is to support community-based organizations with deep connections and accountability to the communities they serve in order to expand their ability to advocate\* for systems change\*, resulting in increased access to healthy food for those most food insecure. Three-year, \$300,000 grants (\$100,000 per year) will support up to 14 organizations. Complementary support will also help facilitate learning and connection among the grantees and with other organizations and coalitions in North Carolina working to address the root causes of food insecurity and the systemic barriers to healthy food.

## Background

While there are many factors that influence a person's health, key among them is food security. Food security, or more specifically consistent access to affordable and nutritious food, has significant bearing on physical, mental, and cognitive health outcomes. Lack of food security can lead to malnutrition, obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, mental health conditions, and poor child development.

North Carolina is a leading agricultural state with a robust farm and food community that is part of a national and global system that produces a more than ample supply of food. Despite this, however, more than 1.2 million people (1 in 8) who live in our state are food insecure. And certain populations and communities are disproportionately impacted. For example, according to national data: 9 out of 10 high food insecurity counties are rural; American Indian and Black individuals are almost three times more likely to face hunger, while for Latinos it is two and a half times; and recent immigrants from various countries also experience hunger at higher rates and are less likely to receive government food assistance.

There are many contributing factors at play. And there are many policy and systemic barriers keeping everyone in North Carolina from having the opportunity to benefit from healthy, accessible food. Examples include communities that experience limited healthy food in retail stores; lack of public transportation and safe walkways to grocery stores; zoning laws or land ordinances that don't support urban agriculture; limited access to land, water, physical space, and capital to engage in food production; the absence of enough workforce training programs to create career pathways in food for residents from under-resourced communities; and more.

There are grassroots and community-based organizations across the state that have experience with, and insights about, these types of barriers along with potential solutions. In many instances, however, they lack the adequate resources, or additional supports, needed to act. In response, this funding opportunity is designed to support locally focused, community-based organizations to enhance their ability to affect the change needed to address the root causes of food insecurity for those most impacted. This includes, among other things, advocating for policy and systems changes at local, county, and state levels.

These grants aim to strengthen organizational capacity to elevate and share perspectives as experts; build relationships with local and state level advocates and decision makers; and ultimately influence system change priorities and actions that reflect the needs, and insights, of those who experience the greatest barriers to accessible and healthy food.

This opportunity aligns with our foundation's organizational priorities to increase access to healthy food for everyone in North Carolina and to grow the network of organizations working to identify and achieve policy and systems changes aligned with the needs of communities most impacted by food insecurity. In total, \$4.2 million has been allocated to support 14 organizations for up to \$100,000 per year, over three years.

## Eligibility Criteria

### Organization Size

- There are no limitations or minimum requirements with regard to an entities' operating budget. Organizations of all sizes are eligible to apply.

### Organization Type

- **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).

- OR-

- **Fiscally sponsored program** – A group or project with a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization acting as a fiscal sponsor. Please note that the fiscal sponsor is considered the grantee and is responsible for all legal aspects of the project including reporting and financial management.

- OR-

- **Coalitions** – Applications involving more than one group or organization are welcome; however, one organization will be the recipient of the grant and must be an established 501(c)(3) nonprofit or fiscally sponsored organization. Organizations and coalitions of any size are eligible to apply if the other eligibility criteria have been met.

### Organization Characteristics

The following are required to be considered for funding.

- *Addressing food insecurity* – eligible organizations will serve communities and populations impacted by high rates of food insecurity and lack of access to healthy food.
- *Focused, even moderately, on local policy and systems change* – eligible organizations will have specific policy and/or systems change priorities to address food insecurity and break down barriers to healthy food.
- *Grounded in community* – eligible organizations will be deeply connected to community, such as:
  - Organizational priorities center the community in which they are working.
  - Inclusion of community members in the organization's decision-making and operations.

**Please note:** Current and past Blue Cross NC Foundation grantees are welcome to apply.

### **Description of the Funded Work**

This opportunity is specifically designed to support nonprofit organizations with deep connections and accountability to the communities they serve in order to increase their ability to advocate for changes and solutions that address the root causes of food insecurity. Grant funds can be used to support staff time, materials, and expenses for a mix of advocacy-related activities. For example, these could include – but are not limited to – the following:

- Community listening sessions or other community data collection activities to identify priority issues and solutions.

- Strengthening communications and outreach efforts, including storytelling, to increase awareness and visibility and to build reputation.
- Relationship building work and collaboration with other organizations, advocates, and decision makers at the institutional, municipal, county, state, or federal levels.
- Engaging the community around priority issues, e.g., community forums, neighborhood canvassing.
- Concentrated efforts or “campaigns” to educate the public and decision makers about the organization’s top issues and/or solutions.
- Providing institutional and/or government decision-makers with information about systems and conditions that perpetuate barriers to healthy food, along with potential solutions.
- Training and supporting new leaders from the community to advocate for change.
- Training for new or existing staff to strengthen skills and competencies needed to be an effective advocate (e.g., communication, collaboration, leadership). Travel and meeting expenses to visit other organizations for learning, relationship building, and/or collaboration.
- Other activities that will contribute to the expansion of the organization’s capacity to advocate for change.

**Please note: Blue Cross NC Foundation funding cannot be earmarked for, or directly support, lobbying\*, lobbying related activities, and/or partisan activities.**

#### Additional Opportunities

In addition to funding, the Foundation will provide grantees additional opportunities based on grantee needs and interests for the purposes of learning and relationship building including:

- Related technical assistance, training, or other learning experiences to enhance grantee effectiveness and impact.
- Attendance support for related conferences.
- Meetings and other connection-building activities with other grantees and organizations working to advance policy and systems change to improve access to healthy food.

**Please note:** Any travel-related expenses to engage in additional learning and relationship building opportunities will be paid for by the Foundation. Language access support (translation and interpretation) will be provided for participants as needed.

#### Anticipated Outcomes

There are four primary anticipated outcomes for which funded organizations will report progress toward throughout the grant period. These include:

- Enhanced organizational capacity to advocate for changes in systems that increase access to healthy food.
- Increased engagement in efforts to change the systems that increase access to healthy food at the institutional, municipal, county, state, or federal levels.
- Increased connections with other local and state advocates.
- Increased visibility of organization’s leadership and priorities for changing the systems that increase access to healthy food.

## Funding Partnership Commitment

As a partner with our grantees throughout this work, our Foundation commits to:

- Authentic engagement with grantees with a focus on listening to understand.
- Support grantees to achieve their goals and to adapt to new or 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 and adapt.
- Provide timely communication about any changes or updates that might impact grantees.
- Operate in consistency with our organizational values working to assure that everyone in North Carolina has the opportunity to be as healthy as possible.

## How to Learn More

**Ask Questions (optional):** Organizations interested in this opportunity are encouraged to submit questions about the funding opportunity **by September 27, 2023** to [info@bcbsncfoundation.org](mailto:info@bcbsncfoundation.org). An FAQ will be posted to the Foundation website by **October 6, 2023**.

## How to Apply

### Part 1:

**Submit an Application by October 27, 2023:** Organizations seeking funding through this opportunity must complete an [Online Application](#), including answering the questions outlined below as well as providing additional basic organizational information.

**Application Questions:** Answers to the following questions will be submitted as part of the online application process. Responses are limited to five total pages and can be presented in a list or narrative format.

1. Describe your organization's current work as it relates to increasing access to healthy food for those most impacted by food insecurity in your community.
  - a. Describe the population(s)/communities served by your organization and the factors that impact food security.
  - b. How are you currently working to increase their access to healthy food?
2. Describe any community accountability mechanisms that your organization has in place.
3. How has your organization worked to change the systems that create barriers to healthy food over the past one to three years? *(The changes we are most interested in go beyond programming and direct service to fundamentally change the systems impacting the broader community, as opposed to individuals.)*
4. Over the next three years, what are some of the key barriers and opportunities related to addressing the root causes of food insecurity and healthy food access in your community that you would like to advocate for? *(We realize these may change over the course of the grant.)*
5. What 3-5 key stakeholders, stakeholder groups, organizations, and/or agencies inside or outside your community do you believe need to be engaged or influenced to address food insecurity and increase healthy food access in your community?
6. Is there anything else you would like to share? *(Response to this question is optional.)*

**Please note:** For issues or questions about the submission process or to discuss alternate submission arrangements other than the Foundation’s [online application portal](#), please contact [info@bcbsncfoundation.org](mailto:info@bcbsncfoundation.org).

Following the application deadline, Foundation staff and external reviewers with related experience will review all submissions and contact applicants regarding next steps by January 8, 2024. A smaller group of organizations will be invited to participate in the second part of the application process.

**Part 2:**

**Finalist Conversation (Virtual) by February 29, 2024:** A smaller group of organizations (finalists) will be selected to participate in a follow-up virtual conversation (such as by Zoom) to share more about their organization, their community, the key barriers and opportunities to increase access to healthy food, and how the grant funds would expand the organization’s capacity to advocate (a project budget will be requested from all finalists). Specific questions will be shared in advance of these conversations, and no written documentation or slides are required.

Foundation staff and external reviewers with related experience will participate in all the virtual finalist conversations. Organizations will be notified whether their work is approved for funding by April 3, 2024.

**Timeline**

Activity	Date(s)
Funding opportunity released and online application form opens	September 13, 2023
Submit questions about the funding opportunity	By September 27, 2023
Answers to prospective applicant questions posted on the Foundation website	By October 6, 2023
Applications due	By October 27, 2023
Finalist decision notifications	By January 8, 2024
Finalist conversations (virtual)	By February 29, 2024
Grantees selected and notified	By April 3, 2024
Grant start date	May 1, 2024
Grant end date	April 30, 2027

*Note: The timeline anticipates a high number of applications and accounts for the engagement of external reviewers and the fall/winter holiday season.*

## Key Terms and Definitions

**Advocacy:** In the context of this Funding Opportunity, advocacy means making the case for changes to a system related to increasing access to healthy food. 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.

**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 training to familiarize them with state and federal rules about lobbying. **No Blue Cross NC Foundation grant funding can be earmarked for lobbying.**

**Systems Change:** Change that addresses the conditions that cause a problem or allow it to persist. Common conditions impacted by systems change include rules, policies, practices, relationships, power dynamics, mindsets, and resource allocation. This type of change can occur at multiple levels. It is also focused on supporting the broader community, as opposed to individuals directly. Below are some types of systems changes to increase access to healthy food (not an exhaustive list).

- Zoning laws or land ordinances that promote and support urban agriculture/community gardens.
- Allocation of public funds, private capital investments, and/or institutional food purchasing policies that increase opportunity to produce and consume healthy food, e.g., community-owned food enterprises in under-resourced communities or favorable sourcing from small producers.
- Publicly funded financial incentives to purchase local healthy food.
- Integration of healthy food access into pedestrian planning allowing for safe walkways to grocery stores.
- Public transportation improvements to allow for greater grocery store access, e.g., hours, routes, fare subsidies, or elimination.
- Leverage underutilized public and private buildings and physical spaces to increase access to healthy food, e.g., local food aggregation, storage, processing, and distribution; shared-use commercial kitchen; healthy and affordable community-based meal program.
- Public-private and other partnerships to support workforce training programs to create career pathways for residents from under-resourced communities and support local agriculture and/or healthy food retail.

## About the Foundation

The Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina Foundation is a private, charitable foundation established as an independent entity by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina in 2000. Its mission is to improve the health and well-being of everyone in North Carolina. Over the past two decades, the organization has worked with - and supported - nonprofit organizations, government entities, and community partnerships across the state, investing \$200 million into North Carolina through more than 1,300 grants, collaborations, and special initiatives. Within its focus areas of access to care, early childhood, healthy communities, healthy food, and oral health, the Foundation strives to address the key drivers of health, taking a flexible approach designed to meet identified needs in partnership with the community.