

## Community Oral Health Priority Exploration

### Request for Services (RFS)

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina Foundation requests the services of a consultant to support five organizations across North Carolina to better understand the oral health needs of their communities and increase their ability to advocate for practice and policy change priorities to support the improvement of oral health access and outcomes. This work will include individualized technical assistance, peer learning, and support for strategic communications over a three-year period.

**RFS Release Date:** December 14<sup>th</sup>, 2023\*

**Full Applications Due:** January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2024

**Response Format:** Electronic submission via online portal

**RFS Contact:** **Daijah Street Davis**  
Director, Oral Health  
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**\*Note:** Due to this request's end of year release, this opportunity has a seven-week application submission window, which is longer than our typical response time. This is intended to create flexibility and encourage applicant organizations to honor planned staff time off and other end of year priorities, as relevant.

*Pre-submission inquiries regarding this opportunity may be addressed via email to Daijah Street Davis at the email above by January 12<sup>th</sup>, 2024. Additionally, interested applicants may schedule a consultation call during pre-determined time slots [here](#).*

## **Background**

Blue Cross NC Foundation has been funding oral health-focused work for more than a decade with the primary goal of improving access to quality, affordable oral health care for all in North Carolina. To date, we have invested close to \$10 million in oral health-specific organizations and initiatives, including the North Carolina Oral Health Collaborative (NCOHC), an entity that convenes and builds the capacity of oral health stakeholders to achieve a shared policy agenda; the School-Based Oral Health Initiative, a five-year collaborative effort with The Duke Endowment to support the spread of oral health care into school settings; and safety-net focused grants to launch new access points for care and to expand or increase efficiency at current access points.

Over the last 10 years, progress toward the goal of increased access to oral health care has been made, namely through increased clinical infrastructure, increased coordination of oral health advocates and partners, and [regulatory changes](#) achieved by consistent and strategic efforts by the NCOHC, and many other partners. There is still more work to be done, as disparities in oral health access and outcomes remain by race, ethnicity, geography, and language, among other categories.

Existing beliefs about who has the capacity and expertise to inform and engage in oral health advocacy has influenced who typically participates in the development of system-change solutions. These participants typically hold a clinical perspective. This vantage point is necessary and valuable, but there is a gap in representation of the parts of patients' lives less visible from the dental chair. Intentional inclusion of community members, especially those who are not currently accessing care, or who have negative experiences in the oral health system, is key to designing a system that increases access for everyone in North Carolina.

In response, our foundation has identified investment in community voice as an important opportunity to begin to expand the perspectives that inform oral health system change priorities and create conditions for a more diverse group of advocates to work together to develop and achieve shared goals.

To begin shifting this narrative, we seek to invest in five North Carolina organizations who serve and hold strong levels of accountability with groups experiencing oral health access and outcome disparities in our state. These investments will occur through an open funding opportunity, separate from this request for services, with an expected release in the summer of 2024. Grantees will explore community needs, attitudes, and experiences related to oral health and develop a 'data sketch' – a one-to-two-page representation of the community exploration findings.

The grantee data sketches will be utilized to engage North Carolina oral health stakeholders with the goal of sparking new conversations and increased consideration of community perspectives on oral health. Grantees will also identify practice and policy change priorities to support the improvement of oral health access and outcomes and make relevant connections to support future action.

The contractor identified through this RFS will function as a source of individualized grantee support and a collaborator for data sketch development, design, and strategic communications.

## **Description of Services Requested**

Blue Cross NC Foundation is seeking a contractor to serve as both a thought partner as we launch this new funding opportunity, as well as a source of ongoing support for the resulting grantees. We anticipate selected grantees will reflect the diverse communities that experience oral health inequities by race, culture, geography, and language. Grantee organizations may also reflect varied sizes, structures, and cultures/work styles; therefore, a flexible, individualized approach to supporting each grantee is necessary.

**Please note:** The Foundation is committed to language access throughout applicants and grantees' engagement with us. Creating inclusive, multilingual environments allows for people to communicate, understand, and be understood in the language they prefer. As part of this commitment, the Foundation contracts with language access vendors that provide translation and simultaneous interpretation support. The Foundation will cover the cost of translation and interpretation services related to the activities of this RFS, as detailed below. Vendors or other organizations supporting grantees will be expected to work in coordination with language access providers to deliver services. The Foundation will provide further details regarding the language access process during vendor onboarding.

Specific components of the work and the vendor role includes:

### **Funding Opportunity Development**

- Thought partnership for the Foundation in further scoping, developing, and describing the funding opportunity.

### **Individualized Technical Assistance and Learning Opportunities**

- Coaching and support for a diverse group of grantees as they develop and implement a strategy for exploring their target population's perceptions of, and experience with, oral health.
- Identifying grantee learning content and skill-building needs and meeting them through individual and group opportunities, as appropriate.
  - *Example topics:* oral health data resources, oral health and whole-body health, Medicaid in North Carolina, policy advocacy skill-building, hosting an effective focus group, storytelling and handling the stories of others with care, etc.
- Supporting grantees in identifying policy and practice implications related to data findings and next step development throughout the initiative.

### **Peer Learning**

- Plan and develop opportunities for cross-grantee connections and conversations in collaboration with the Foundation.
  - *Examples:* all-grantee or multi-grantee skill-building or content knowledge building (as noted in the example above), cross-grantee knowledge sharing, skill sharing or collaboration facilitation, multi-grantee connections/collaborations with other relevant organizations or individual stakeholders, etc.

### **Data Sketch Development**

- Thought partnership and support to grantees as they analyze exploration findings and develop data sketch content. This could include general review, theme selection, consultation on strategies for sharing community stories with care and dignity, developing feedback loops to share back with community members, etc.

### **Strategic Communications of Community Data Sketches**

- Identifying and uplifting common threads across grantee projects to include in the final data-sketch design and subsequent strategic communications.
- Collaboration with the Foundation and grantees to develop a strategic vision guiding development and dissemination of the community data sketches.

- Design of final, five-grantee, ‘community data sketch’ compilation publication and any accompanying materials.
- Facilitate the dissemination of community data sketches in collaboration with the grantees and Foundation.

### Minimum Requirements

The scope of this request for proposals is wide and represents our current thinking on the ideal support for this initiative. We recognize that there may be potential applicants who do not provide the communications services requested, who are otherwise well-suited for the other aspects of the work. We welcome proposals from those who may fall in this category, if they meet the following minimum requirements related to project scope:

- Thought partnership to the Foundation.
- Individualized grantee technical assistance and learning support.
- Peer learning support.
- Grantee support for data sketch content development (excluding design work).

### Anticipated Activities and Roles by Phase

We have organized the planned activities and services into phases and anticipated roles in the chart below. We recognize that community-focused exploration rarely follows a linear path, therefore this plan is a tool for clarity in collaboration and a starting point with room for adjustment. The timeframes included are estimates that represent our current thinking. We welcome reflection and feedback on this plan as part of responses to this opportunity.

	Anticipated Role		
	Grantee	Contractor	Foundation
<b>Phase One:</b> <b>Planning and Grantee Selection</b>  <i>4-5 months</i>	<i>Foundation will engage with community organizations/potential applicants to inform refining the funding opportunity.</i>	Provide input on funding opportunity, supporting refinement.  Participate in grantee selection and onboarding, providing input as needed.  Develop plan for understanding each grantee’s initial exploration ideas and assessing the best way to support them in reaching their goals as well as types of support each grantee will need.	Lead development of funding opportunity.  Lead grantee selection and onboarding.  Review, provide feedback on, approve contractor’s grantee support needs assessment plan.
<b>Phase Two:</b> <b>Grantee Community Exploration</b>  <i>12 months</i>	Lead community exploration plan development and implementation.  Participation in	Develop and implement individualized TA/learning plans with grantee input, to support the development and implementation of their community	Review community exploration plans to stay informed.  Support peer learning opportunity implementation, as

	individualized and group TA and learning opportunities as offered and relevant.	<p>exploration.</p> <p>Develop and implement peer learning opportunities.</p> <p>Sharing progress on a regular cadence – written reports and check-in calls with the Foundation.</p>	<p>needed.</p> <p>Provide thought partnership and connections to grantees and contractor as needed.</p> <p>Participate in a sub-set of peer learning opportunities to stay informed and provide support as useful.</p> <p>Participate in regular check-in calls with contractor.</p>
<p><b>Phase Three:</b>  <b>Grantee Data Sketch Development and Collaborative Strategic Communications Planning</b></p> <p><i>6-9 months</i></p>	<p>Develop data sketch content, collaborate with contractor on shared vision for final product.</p> <p>Contribute to communications plan visioning and development.</p>	<p>Continued implementation of individualized and group TA/learning opportunities, with a shift in focus toward supporting grantee:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Data sketch development</li> <li>- Community next step determination</li> </ul> <p>Collaborate with the Foundation and grantees to develop a strategic vision for the impacts of the individual and collective community data sketches.</p> <p>Support grantee content development through review/revision.</p> <p>Lead development of communications plan, collaborating with grantees and the Foundation, and ensuring mutual agreement.</p>	<p>Review data sketch content.</p> <p>Support peer learning opportunity implementation, as needed.</p> <p>Provide thought partnership and connections to grantees as needed.</p> <p>Participate in a sub-set of peer learning opportunities to stay informed and provide support as useful.</p> <p>Contribute to communications plan visioning and development.</p> <p>Review and approve final communications plan.</p>
<p><b>Phase Four:</b>  <b>Collaborative Data Sketch Finalization</b></p> <p><i>2-3 months</i></p>	<p>Review, provide feedback, give final approval of designed data sketch, in collaboration with the Foundation.</p>	<p>Design final data sketch with significant input from grantees and the Foundation.</p>	<p>Review, provide feedback, give final approval of designed data sketch, in collaboration with grantees.</p>

<b>Phase Five: Strategic Communications Plan Implementation</b>  <i>2-4 months</i>	Support implementation of communications plan through end of grant period, at minimum.	Support implementation of communications plan.  Collaborate with oral health stakeholders in North Carolina to facilitate plan implementation, as appropriate.	Support implementation of communications plan.  Coordinate collaboration with NC oral health stakeholders, per plan details.
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### Work and Deliverables/Project Scope

- The development and implementation of one-to-one technical assistance and learning plans for five grantees, to support the identification of notable challenges and opportunities related to oral health in each community and increase the likelihood of implementation of community-centered solutions. Connections should be held on a regular cadence (to be further defined) and plans should be formally revisited at least once during the initiative to ensure continued right-size and relevance.
- Identifying needs and executing learning and skill-building opportunities for grantees.
- The development and implementation of peer and shared learning opportunities for grantees.
- Written quarterly reports and monthly check-in calls with Foundation staff to share grantee progress, emergent themes, and lessons learned; supporting clarity and informed decision-making between all partners.
- In partnership with grantees, develop a compilation of the five ‘Community Data Sketches’ – formatted and designed for distribution.
- The development of a communications plan to uplift the themes and stories surfaced through data sketches and support for implementation.

### Desired Skills, Qualities, and Attributes

- Experience with oral health from a community-centered perspective.
- Understanding of and experience with North Carolina context.
- Experience with qualitative data analysis, data driven decision making, and data visualization.
- The ability to provide all requested services in-house, *or* to apply with partners who you have a demonstrated history of successful collaboration with and the ability to lead project management on delegated activities.
- Commitment to and experience applying an equity lens to the work.
- High value for the wisdom of community and lived experience, and vision for supporting its increased incorporation into the North Carolina oral health ecosystem.
- Demonstrates an understanding of the potential power dynamics between patients and clinicians.

### Anticipated Timeline

Key Activity	Estimated Date
Request for Services Released	12/14/23
Consultation Calls	12/20/23, 1/10/24
Applicant Questions Due	1/12/24

Responses to Applicant Questions {Posted on Website}	1/17/24
Proposals Due	1/31/24
Proposal Review ( <i>The Foundation may reach out with follow-up questions and/or to clarify aspects of the proposal</i> )	2/1/24 - 2/21/24
Finalist Interviews and Selection	2/26/24 - 3/12/24
Decision Notification	March/April 2024
Contract Start	May/June 2024
Contract Close	May 2026

### Proposal Requirements

Please include the following in your proposal:

#### 1. Proposal narrative

- a. **Values and approach.** Describe the values that guide your work and how they show up in the way you approach your work.
- b. **Scope of services.** Please briefly describe the scope of your services, specifically indicating if your proposal does not include communications support.
- c. **Approach to services.** Please describe your proposed approach to the work, including the following (as applicable):
  - i. providing thought partnership to the Foundation as it pertains to developing the funding opportunity.
  - ii. the methods you would use to craft individualized TA and learning plans, including details on how you will differentiate your services based on each grantee’s unique experience and context.
  - iii. Peer/shared learning opportunities.
  - iv. Supporting the creation and dissemination of the data sketches.
- d. **What challenges and opportunities** do you foresee related to the implementation of the initiative? How can your team’s skillset support the Foundation in the mitigation of these challenges and maximizing the opportunities?
- e. **Organizational history and qualifications for this project.** Elevate information on the desired skills, qualities, and attributes outlined above. Please include information regarding the proposed project lead and team members.
  - i. Our preference is to hire one organization that can complete all requested services in-house, with an exception for specialized technical assistance needs or skill-building that may be identified. We are also open to organizations with long-standing collaborations with others to fill in gaps in expertise or capacity. If your organization’s proposal falls into the latter category, please describe the structured nature of your collaboration, including how you manage accountability for the delegated work, ensure buy-in from these partners, and create cohesion/continuity. Additionally,

include details on who your partners are, their qualifications for this work, and how long you have collaborated with them.

## 2. **Cost proposal**

We are estimating that there will be up to \$475,000 available for all aspects of this work, aside from any in-person convening costs and language access costs. With potential for flexibility depending on the proposals received. Please submit a budget based on your high-level work plan, outlining the costs associated with your proposal. Specify major budget categories and include all costs required to complete the work, such as staff time and resources required for the development and implementation of virtual shared learning opportunities. You do not need to include the cost of any proposed in-person convenings or language access services, as the logistics and cost will be managed by the Foundation.

*Please note, additional information such as primary point of contact and references, will be collected in the application portal. References should be individuals outside your organization with whom your team has worked and who can comment on your organization's skills, experience, and work style.*

### **Submission and Deadline**

Please submit your proposal [here](#) by **11:59 pm on January 31, 2024**.

### **Assumptions**

The Blue Cross NC Foundation is not liable for costs incurred by any firm or individual associated with the preparation of a response to this RFS.

### **About the Blue Cross NC 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. Over the past two decades, the organization has worked with - and supported - nonprofit organizations, government entities, and community partnerships across the state, investing \$219 million into North Carolina through more than 1,400 grants. 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.