



Franciscan Children's Community Health Initiative

Request for Proposals: Expanding and Diversifying the Children's Mental and Behavioral Health Workforce

Background

In July 2023, Franciscan Children's and Boston Children's finalized their institutional affiliation to enhance the system of behavioral health care of children and youth and improve care for children with complex rehabilitation needs. Consistent with their complementary charitable missions, Franciscan Children's and Boston Children's are working to expand access to compassionate, equitable, family-centered, and evidence-based care for children in Massachusetts and across New England.

As a result of this partnership and plans for a new clinical building in Brighton, there is a new funding opportunity for community organizations in Boston. The **Franciscan Children's Community Health Initiative**, a part of [*Boston Children's Collaboration for Community Health*](#), aims to improve the health and well-being of children, youth, and families impacted by inequities in health and the social determinants of health. Our community-identified goal for this funding opportunity is to expand and diversify the mental and behavioral health workforce serving children, youth, and families.

Need

The need for investment in children's mental health and wellbeing in Massachusetts is high. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, one in five children and youth experience a behavioral health condition. In Boston, school-aged youth have experienced increases in depressive symptoms and suicidal ideation. Massachusetts is experiencing a severe behavioral workforce shortage impacting the ability of children and youth to access vital mental health services and resources in a timely way. For every 10 clinicians entering the workforce, 13 clinicians leave. Children and adolescents spend an average of 15 weeks on a waitlist before starting ongoing therapy ([Massachusetts Association of Health Plans, 2023](#)). Low-income families and communities of color are disproportionately impacted by the shortage of providers.

While there has been significant investment in mental health by state and city government, the need remains significant. Workforce solutions that provide career development opportunities to paraprofessionals and prepare diverse students for licensed roles can help to address the children’s mental and behavioral health workforce shortage ([The Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation, September 29, 2022](#)). Workforce solutions that foster a sense of belonging and provide opportunities for learning and growth can also support retention of early career staff.

Funding Opportunity

This Request for Proposals (RFP) aims to facilitate creative community partnership efforts that expand and diversify the pipeline of trained mental and behavioral health professionals and graduate students who work with children and youth.

To expand and diversify the pipeline of trained behavioral health professionals for children and youth, projects must focus on one of two areas:

- 1. Expand pathways for mental and behavioral health paraprofessionals serving children, youth, and families to enter, stay, and grow in the field.** Projects may seek to expand the use of peer paraprofessionals or coordinate a systematic approach to work and training for staff in community or inpatient settings. Examples of roles include but are not limited to: Behavioral Health Technician, Certified Nursing Assistant, Clinical Assistant, Care Companion, Behavioral Health Counselor, Mental Health Specialists, Family Partner, Community Health Worker, Therapeutic Mentor, etc. Grants will expand job training and workforce pathways for roles in children’s mental and behavioral health, including skill development, career exploration, job readiness, and/or certification. Geographic priority includes neighborhoods in Boston and communities throughout Greater Boston (as defined by the [Metropolitan Area Planning Council](#)).

Target applicant audience and projects for this option include but are not limited to:

- Nonprofit healthcare and community health organizations supporting cohorts of paraprofessional staff to grow and advance in mental and behavioral health roles.
- Nonprofit workforce development organizations supporting cohorts of paraprofessionals with training and certification for roles in child and adolescent mental and behavioral health.
- Nonprofit educational institutions preparing paraprofessionals to occupy roles in the field of child and adolescent mental and behavioral health.

Or

- 2. Help educational institutions attract and prepare diverse underrepresented graduate students to:** 1) pursue a master's or doctoral degree in mental and behavioral health at a waived or reduced rate with onsite or online learning options and/or 2) provide cohort-based supervision and/or licensure support for early career professionals or recent graduates in community, outpatient, or inpatient settings. A focus on students from underrepresented backgrounds including racial, ethnic, cultural, LGBTQ+, and language backgrounds is a qualification for funding. Grants will support educational institutions to work in partnership with community-based organizations serving children, youth, and/or families.

Target applicant audience and projects for this option include but are not limited to:

- Public or private educational institutions providing tuition scholarships for underrepresented graduate students to pursue a master's degree (e.g. social work) or doctoral degree (e.g. psychology) with a focus on child or adolescent mental and behavioral health.
- Public or private educational institutions providing internship stipends and basic needs support for cohorts of underrepresented graduate students to obtain a master's or doctoral level clinical degree focused on children, youth, and/or families.
- Public or private educational institutions providing low or no cost cohort-based supervision and licensure support for underrepresented early career professionals.

Total Funding

- A total of \$2.4 million will be available for this funding opportunity.
- Funding will support projects for 3 years from June 1, 2025 to May 31, 2028. There will be a second competitive round of funding available in 2028.
- Applicants may apply for up to \$200,000 per year over 3 years. Total requests should not exceed \$600,000.
- We anticipate funding up to 4 applications through this competitive RFP process.
- Applicants may apply for one area, not both.
- All applications will be competitively reviewed.

Eligibility and Priorities

- Nonprofit organizations with 501 C3 status, which may include workforce development organizations with experience in healthcare, healthcare organizations such as community health centers, and public or private educational institutions.
- Practices or entities owned by Boston Children's are not eligible to apply or receive funds but may serve as collaborators. Franciscan Children's is not eligible to apply or receive funds but may serve as a collaborator.
- Private foundations are not eligible.
- Public or private academic institutions must demonstrate a shared financial commitment to the project in the proposed budget.
- Priority will be given to partnerships with community-based organizations that are located in or serve children, youth and/or families in Allston, Brighton, Dorchester, East Boston, Hyde Park, Jamaica Plain, Mattapan, Mission Hill, and Roxbury.
- Cohort-based models that foster a sense of belonging and shared commitment among students.
- Projects that apply trauma-informed and culturally responsive approaches and have a track record in training, supporting and supervising individuals from diverse backgrounds.
- Projects must engage paraprofessionals or students from underrepresented backgrounds including racial, ethnic, cultural, LGBTQ+, and/or language backgrounds.

Support for Applicants

Boston Children's will hold an optional information session on **Wednesday, December 18, 11:00-12:00 pm** via Zoom (register [here](#)). There will be an opportunity to have your questions answered during this session. The session will be recorded and responses to questions will be posted online in the application portal. Applicants can also sign up for office hours with Boston Children's (register [here](#)) or with evaluation partner Health Resources in Action (email Cassandra Tavaras at ctavaras@hria.org). Applicants can also email questions to Debbie.Lay@childrens.harvard.edu at any point in the application process.

Use of Grant Funds

Grant funds may be used for project staff salaries, student financial support, data collection and analysis, meetings, supplies, project-related travel, and other direct expenses, including a limited amount of equipment deemed essential to the project. Indirect expenses (e.g. rent, utilities) may not exceed 10% of the total request. Grant funds may not be used to provide medical services, support clinical trials, construct or renovate healthcare facilities, or substitute funds currently being used to support similar activities.

Evaluation

A report evaluating the project and sharing progress and results is required at the midpoint and end of each grant year. The Franciscan Children's Community Health Initiative evaluation partner, Health Resources in Action, will work with applicants selected to receive funding to design and finalize an evaluation plan with specific project monitoring and outcome indicators.

Sharing and Learning

Selected projects will be expected to participate in at least two sharing and learning activities annually hosted by Boston Children's. Organizational leadership and project staff can attend. While not required, partners may be encouraged to collaborate with staff from Boston Children's to support the project's goals and foster a strong, ongoing partnership.

Key Dates

Item	Date
Request for Proposals released	By December 10, 2024
Virtual information session	Wednesday, December 18, 2024, 11:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. Register here
Office hours with Boston Children’s and Health Resources in Action	January 6 to February 4, 2025 With Boston Children’s: Register here With Health Resources in Action: Email ctavaras@hria.org
Proposals due	Friday, February 7, 2025 by 5:00 p.m.
Applicants notified	By Monday, April 14, 2025
Virtual Funded Partner Kick Off meeting	Wednesday, May 28, 2025, 2:00 – 3:00 p.m.
Grant period (3 years)	June 1, 2025 – May 30, 2028
Collaboration for Community Health Annual Funded Partner Convening	Tuesday, June 10, 2025, 9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.
Year 1 reports due	December 2025/June 2026
Year 2 reports due	December 2026/June 2027
Year 3 reports due	December 2027/June 2028

Contact name and email: Debbie Lay, Senior Project Manager for Community Health Initiatives, Office of Community Health, Debbie.Lay@childrens.harvard.edu.

Application Instructions

Deadline

The deadline to submit applications is **Friday, February 7, 2025 by 5 p.m.** All applications must be submitted online at <https://bostonchildrens.smapply.io/>. Applicants will be notified of funding decisions via email by April 14, 2025.

Submission Instructions

Applications will be accepted using our [online application portal](#). Sign up for an account if you are a new user of the [Survey Monkey Apply portal](#). Once you have logged in, select the initiative you are applying for to start your application. If you are a grant writer, please register using the name and email address for the primary contact of the application. Once you have completed the application, you must click 'Submit' to formally submit your application. You will receive notification by email that the submission was received. Use Google Chrome for the best experience. See Survey Monkey Apply frequently asked questions for applicants [here](#).

Application Requirements

Application Components:

- Cover Letter (Please include amount of funding requested and key project and reporting contact information)
- Proposal Narrative (See application questions below)
- Scope of Services (Use [template provided](#))
- Project Budget (Use [template provided](#))
- Resumes/CVs for project staff
- W-9 Tax Form for organization or fiscal sponsor (Use [provided form](#). Must include the address where award payment should be mailed)
- Two Letters of Support (From someone outside of your organization)
- Partnership Letter(s) stating commitment and role of partner organization(s)

Application Questions:

Section 1: Applicant contact information and overview

1. Organizational information.
2. Describe your organization, mission, communities served, and your experience preparing diverse individuals in the child and adolescent mental and behavioral health and/or workforce development fields. (500 words)

Section 2: Project overview

3. Project Title. (50 words)
4. Identify which approach you will use for this project. (Select one)
 - Expand pathways for mental and behavioral health paraprofessionals serving children, youth, and families to enter, stay, and grow in the field.**

OR

- Help educational institutions attract and prepare diverse underrepresented graduate students to:** 1) pursue a master's or doctoral degree in mental and behavioral health at a waived or reduced rate with onsite or online learning options and/or 2) provide cohort-based supervision and/or licensure support for early career professionals or recent graduates in community, outpatient, or inpatient settings.
5. For your proposed project, identify the target population and reach for year 1, year 2, and year 3 of the project. Please identify the demographic backgrounds of the individuals to be served for this project including racial, ethnic, linguistic, geographic, LGBTQ+, and cultural backgrounds as applicable. (250 words)
6. Identify the request per year and total funding request for this project. (50 words)

Section 3: Project description

7. Describe the need for your project. How will your project promote equity throughout the delivery of your project? (300 words)
8. Describe your proposed project in detail and what you hope to achieve over the next three years. Please discuss the scope and sequence of any curriculum that will be used. If you are building on an existing partnership with a community health organization, be sure to address how the project will enhance your existing partnership. (750 words)
9. Please detail your organization's outreach plan to engage individuals from diverse backgrounds for this project, and describe how you will include cohort-based, trauma-informed, and culturally responsive approaches to training these individuals. (500 words)
10. Describe your organization's experience in training supervisors, and how your organization will provide training geared to understanding and navigating the organizational contexts in which your trainees/students will be working. (300 words)

Section 4: Outcomes, Partners, and Budget

11. Reflect on what success looks like for this project, including how retention will be factored into your efforts. Please list anticipated outcomes for Year 1, Year 2, and Year 3 and how you plan to measure those outcomes. (300 words)
12. Describe your plans to share the data that you collect from the proposed project. (200 words)
13. Describe your key community-based organizational partners for the project, your connection to one another, and your roles on the project. (200 words)
14. Describe the skills and capabilities of the staff who will implement and evaluate your project's activities. If there are new staff roles to be filled, describe your plans for hiring, including how you will make progress on your project should there be a hiring delay. (300 words)
15. Describe the racial/ethnic, gender and geographic identities of your organization's management, staff, and board and how this diversity might inform or benefit the project. (200 words)
16. Describe how funds from Franciscan Children's - Boston Children's will continue to support the project's overall success and any ways it will help to leverage other funding sources, if applicable. Be sure to discuss efforts that you will take to embed this work in your organization so that the effort is sustained after funding ends. (200 words)
17. OPTIONAL: Please share any other information you would like us to know about your organization or your proposed project. (150 words)

Required Documents (for all applicants):

Submit the following documents with your completed application. If you need assistance, contact debbie.lay@childrens.harvard.edu.

1. Cover Letter (Include amount of funding requested and key project and reporting contact information)
2. Scope of Services (Use template provided [here](#))
3. Project Budget (Use template provided [here](#))
4. Organizational Budget (Use own format)
5. Resumes/CVs for project staff
6. Completed W-9 tax form for organization or from fiscal sponsor (Use form provided [here](#). W-9 submitted must include the specific address where payment should be mailed.)
7. Two Letters of Support (One page, single spaced. Must be from someone outside of your organization.)
8. Partnership Letter stating commitment and role of partner organization(s). If partnering with schools, a letter from the superintendent of the school district is required.

Selection Criteria:

All applications will be evaluated using the criteria below and reviewed by a selection committee using a [Review Tool](#).

- Track record of meaningful training, supervision and support of diverse professionals and connection to the community (Q2, Q9, Q10, Q15, Letters of Support)
- Alignment with the initiative's strategy, priority populations, and priority geographies (Q4, Q5, Scope of Services)
- Clear and comprehensive description of the need and how the proposed project will address it with an equity focus (Q7)
- Potential for positive impact on expanding and diversifying the children's mental and behavioral health workforce (Q8, Q9, Q10, Q11, Q13, Q14, Scope of Services)
- Outcomes that are relevant, measurable, and achievable (Q11, Q12, Scope of Services)
- Strong community partnerships (Q8, Q13, Partnership Letter)
- Sufficient staff capacity and expertise to successfully implement project (Q14, Q16, Budget, Scope of Services, Resumes/CVs)
- Strong plans to embed project into ongoing efforts with budget that accurately reflects the level of project effort and shared financial commitment (Q16, Budget)