



BlueCross BlueShield of Illinois

FY21 Grant Funding Guidelines

Each year, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Illinois invests in communities working with strong non-profits working to improve the health and wellness of people in Illinois. We look forward to another year of productive community collaborations. These guidelines have been created to help applicants better understand our funding priorities.

I. Our Commitment to Community Investment

For more than 80 years, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Illinois (BCBSIL) has supported communities throughout Illinois by investing in non-profit organizations committed to improving the health and lives of people in Illinois. We know that the health and wellness of a community and its residents can be positively transformed when resources are directed to organizations with the expertise and community presence to increase access to care, address health disparities, and create innovative community-based coordinated care models.

Supporting the health and wellness of individuals, families, and communities is core to our business and philosophy. We do this by directing resources- people, time, and dollars- to areas where there is need and community partners on the ground creating meaningful change. These guidelines explain how we invest in Illinois communities through our grant programs. Sponsorship information may be found on our [Community Investment page](#).

II. The Changing Health Landscape

BCBSIL is interested in the innovative ways that health and human service providers are responding to emerging needs and opportunities for improving care, with particular attention to underserved populations, some of whom have access to care for the first time in their lives. Health outcomes do not rest solely upon medical interventions; they also depend on basic needs being met, such as stable housing, food security, transportation and access to culturally competent providers.

Increasingly, providers and community organizations are developing programs that bundle health and social service interventions. BCBSIL is interested in learning about these innovative programs and what works. Some areas where we see the need to build capacity and expertise, include, but are not limited to:

- Integrating **behavioral health**, substance abuse, and critical social services with physical health care.
- Building healthier and safer communities through interventions that consider **violence as a public health issue**, address the social determinants of health that jeopardize community well-being, and utilize approaches that foster resiliency.

- Supporting **maternal and child health** from pre-conception through early childhood to improve outcomes. This also may include **reproductive health rights** for women of color, young people, immigrant communities, LGBTQ families, gender non-conforming (GNC) people, and others who disproportionately experience a significant difference in health outcomes.
- Employing **housing as a health strategy** for improving health for people experiencing homelessness.
- Providing culturally competent health education and health care services that reflect the knowledge of a specific population and its prevalent health needs to more effectively coordinate care and improve health outcomes.

III. **Two Funding Streams: Healthy Kids, Healthy Families and Community Partners Grants**

BCBSIL awards grants through two separate funding streams: *Healthy Kids, Healthy Families* and *Community Partners Grant*. Non-profit organizations may apply through either (but not both) funding stream. Funding is competitive, so organizations should assess alignment with each stream's funding priorities to determine which grant category best aligns with program objectives.

a. **Healthy Kids, Healthy Families**

Healthy Kids, Healthy Families (HKHF) grants focus on promoting the health and wellness of families and communities, spanning all ages, from children to seniors. Studies show that family and community support can positively impact one's physical and emotional well-being and reinforce healthy behaviors that maintain good health. We are interested in programs that successfully engage people in adopting healthy behaviors across one or more of the following areas:

- Nutrition
- Physical activity
- Disease prevention and management
- Safe environments

b. **Community Partners Grant**

Community Partners Grants (CPG) support innovative programs dedicated to improving health system objectives in divested communities in Illinois. Needs that emerge in communities are diverse; therefore, we are interested in how well local organizations understand the health needs of its constituents and develop and implement strategies to improve these conditions so as to:

- Improve health condition and health insurance literacy
- Increase access to health care
- Enhance care coordination
- Address behavioral and social determinants of health to reduce health disparities

IV. **Our Two-Step Grant Application Process:**

Each year, BCBSIL receives hundreds of proposals for grant funding, reflecting the excellent work happening in our communities. This results in a highly competitive pool of applicants. At the same time, we appreciate the valuable time and resources that organizations dedicate to preparing grant applications. Therefore, to assure the best use of our applicants' resources, we have a two-step process beginning with a Letter of Intent (LOI). **Only one LOI may be submitted per organization.** We will not accept multiple LOIs for multiple programs from one organization.

- **Step 1, online Letter of Intent:** In 2020, consideration for grant funding begins with a Letter of Intent. This is the opportunity for interested applicants to submit an abbreviated proposal online. Those that are selected to progress to the next phase of the application process will be invited to submit a full application. The link to the LOI is posted on our [Community Investment page](#).
- **Step 2, invitation-only application:** Following the review of Letters of Intent, select applicants will be invited to submit a full proposal online. BCBSIL staff will notify invited applicants and provide technical assistance. Late, incomplete, or paper copies of proposals will not be accepted.
- **Grant range:** The award range for CPG and HKHF grants is \$20,000-100,000. Program requests should stay within this range to be considered for BCBSIL funding.

- **Grant term:** In most cases, funding is for one year only and commences July 1, 2020 for 12 months. There is not automatic renewal funding for previously funded organizations. However, based on performance, BCBSIL may select a new grantee or renew an existing grant for a multi-year commitment.
- **Grant selection:** Proposals are evaluated by a grants committee with final funding approvals made by the BCBSIL Community Advisory Board. All funding decisions are final.
- **Reporting:** Grantees must comply with BCBSIL annual reporting requirements and provide data upon request. Failure to do so may jeopardize funding.
- **Key dates:** Process dates for the FY20 grant application process will be posted on our Community Investment page.

V. How We Review Grants: All proposals (LOI and full applications) are evaluated to determine basic eligibility, alignment with BCBSIL strategies and priorities, program quality, and organizational capabilities. We define these criteria in the following ways:

- a) Basic Eligibility:** All organizations must meet the following criteria to be considered for a grant from BCBSIL:
 - Services provided in the state of Illinois
 - Incorporated as a not-for-profit organization and has been delivering services for at least 1 year at the time of application submission
 - Established as a 501(c)3 and in compliance with federal and state regulations and requirements
 - Operates under a non-discrimination policy
 - Governed by an all-volunteer Board of Directors in which Board members are not compensated for service
- b) Alignment with HKHF or CPG Strategy:** Programming must align with the objectives of Healthy Kids, Healthy Families or Community Partners Grants, as explained above. BCBSIL does not provide grants outside of these funding streams.
- c) Program Quality:** We look for high quality programs that align with our community investment strategy and have the potential for positive and sustainable impacts in their communities. For BCBSIL, high quality programming is demonstrated by the following characteristics:
 - **Collaboration:** No one organization can do everything on its own and the challenges facing under-resourced communities demand partnerships across service providers. Providers respond to local needs by creating networks of expertise and support (e.g., referrals, service integration, advocacy, etc.). Roles within these partnerships are explained.
 - **Data Collection and Continuous Quality Improvement:** Programs have a consistent plan of evaluation that includes tools and methods to measure the efficacy of its services. Information is used to demonstrate effectiveness, improve services, and share learnings.
 - **Outcome Performance and Reporting:** Programs have the capacity to track performance and report measurable outcome results on a regular and timely basis.
 - **Community Presence & Engagement:** Organizations have experience with the population served and are recognized within the community as a credible partner. Organization engages community members and clients in identifying issues and ways to best meet those needs.
 - **Evidence-based and Innovative Service Delivery:** Programs offer services that are grounded in clinical expertise and promising practices. Programming is adjusted when indicated to improve care and/or respond to emerging needs or opportunities.

- **Strength-based Approach:** Programs partner with and serve clients and communities from an asset-focused approach. The strengths of individuals and the local community are recognized and leveraged as valuable components to meeting goals.
- **Financial Fitness:** Organizations must have sound financial standing and the capacity to deliver all services as proposed, retain necessary credentialing for service delivery, and meet BCBSIL reporting requirements. Programs should have a diverse portfolio of funding or present a plan for seeking funding from other sources.

VI. What We Do Not Fund

Under its granting process, BCBSIL can only fund 501(c)3 organizations serving Illinois. BCBSIL also does not provide grants to:

- Organizations that do not meet basic eligibility criteria
- Organizations that discriminate based on race, color, religion (creed), gender, gender expression, age, national origin (ancestry), disability, marital status, sexual orientation, or military status
- Grants to individuals
- Programs that are exclusively arts and culture
- Political campaigns or exclusively religious activities
- Government agencies
- Capital campaigns

We thank you for considering BCBSIL as a supporter of your work and community. Questions about the application process for grant funding or sponsorships may be directed to Katie Cangemi (Kathleen_cangemi@bcbsil.com).