

## SYNERGY INITIATIVE GUIDELINES & FAQs

The Healthcare and Health Promotion Synergy Initiative (“Synergy Initiative”) provides funding for partnership-based projects that target significant health issues, especially inequities and disparities, in Central Massachusetts with integrated, comprehensive strategies with an end goal of systems or policy change. The Foundation seeks to support projects that aim to positively impact the most vulnerable residents of Central Massachusetts. The Health Foundation does not identify specific health issues as funding priorities; rather, it responds to health-related needs identified by local communities.

### FUNDING CONSIDERATIONS

The Synergy Initiative typically invites applications every four to five years, and approximately four projects have been selected for funding per round. Selected projects generally progress from planning to pilot to full implementation over the course of three to five years, and requests for continuation grants are considered on an annual basis.

Project budgets vary for each phase, and total investment amounts have averaged approximately \$2 million per project over the grant period. Grantseekers invited to submit full applications are paired with professional evaluators recruited and paid by the Foundation. Approximately 10% of total project budgets are allocated to project evaluation, with variations based on the complexity of the project, design, and methods.

### ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Requests are considered from non-profit organizations with a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) designation as determined by the Internal Revenue Service and/or those operating under a fiscal sponsor with verified tax-exempt status, or government entities (e.g. municipalities, school districts). The organization or proposed project must also fall within the Foundation’s [geographic service area](#) which consists of 81 cities and towns in the Central Massachusetts region in and around Worcester County.

In general, the following types of requests are not considered:

- Endowments;
- Undesignated support for capital campaigns;
- Sponsorship of events;
- Scholarships;
- Recurring operating expenses (as the sole purpose of the grant);
- Retirement of operating deficits/debt; or
- Electoral activities or candidates for public office

### APPLICATION PROCESS

When the next grant cycle opens, an announcement will be made via the Foundation’s e-newsletter and application guidelines and related deadlines for submission will be posted on the website.

## **ASSESSMENT PROCESS**

Funding requests are reviewed by Foundation staff and Directors and decisions are made by the Foundation's Board of Directors. Key criteria for successful Synergy Initiative projects include:

### **Significance of Issue –**

Evidence that the proposal addresses a significant health issue, in terms of both scope and seriousness, as well as a key criterion of addressing the historically underserved.

### **Level of Integration & Collaboration –**

The degree to which the proposed approach is integrated, interdisciplinary, and comprehensive, involving a variety of strategies. Where an individual organization lacks the resources to mount such an integrated program itself, it will be expected to partner with other agencies with complementary goals and capacities, and to demonstrate that the collaboration proposed is serious and effective, rather than creating duplicative programming. Public and/or private co-funding of proposals is welcomed.

### **Soundness of Approach –**

The degree to which the proposed approach to the identified issue is based on an in-depth understanding of the issue and the principal factors affecting it; knowledge of “best practices” developed by others working on the same issues; and a strong connection with the community in which the proposed program or intervention will be implemented, including involvement of people impacted by the proposed project in proposal planning, piloting, and implementation, when appropriate.

### **Quality of Evaluation Plan –**

The soundness of the proposed strategy for assessing the effectiveness and impact of the approach being taken by the applicant, and how lessons learned will be applied and used throughout the project.

### **Potential for Impact –**

Evidence that the applicant organization has the capacity and capability to implement the proposed program effectively to achieve its intended impact.

### **Capacity for Enduring Systems Change –**

The potential for the approach proposed by the applicant to bring about long-term changes in the systems, policies, and practices that directly influence the conditions affecting the issue addressed.

### **Potential for Replication –**

The likelihood that the approach proposed, if proven effective, can be replicated elsewhere.

### **Exit Strategy –**

The appropriateness of the plan proposed by the applicant for dealing with the eventual phasing out of Foundation funding.

## **RESULTS-ORIENTED GRANTMAKING/GRANT-IMPLEMENTATION MODEL**

The Health Foundation's Synergy Initiative embraces a philosophy of partnership between the applicant/grantee, the evaluator, and the Foundation in a shared aim of achieving success. This approach is operationalized through a planning and evaluation system called [Results-Oriented Grantmaking and Grant-Implementation](#) (ROGG, © Dr. Janice B. Yost and Dr. Abraham H. Wandersman). ROGG applies an empowerment evaluation approach to maximize a project's chances of success whereby grantees utilize ten guiding accountability questions to provide the structure for an effective problem-solving process and support the facilitation of program planning and monitoring, the documentation of outcomes, and the sustainability of interventions. Program, evaluator, and funder partners work as a collaborative team throughout the process.

## **QUESTIONS ABOUT THE SYNERGY INITIATIVE**

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## SYNERGY INITIATIVE FAQs

### 1. *What health issues does The Health Foundation fund?*

The Foundation does not identify specific health issues/priority areas for funding and strives to be flexible and responsive to community needs. The Foundation applies a broad definition of health, which encompasses the social determinants of health (SDOH), factors that contribute to health disparities and inequities. Examples of SDOH include: safe housing, transportation, and neighborhoods; racism, discrimination, and violence; education, job opportunities, and income; access to nutritious foods and physical activity opportunities; polluted air and water; and language and literacy skills. **There is not a preference for (or a cap on) funding for any specific health issue or focus area.** For examples of health issues that have been addressed through other grants, please see the list of [previous Synergy Initiative grants](#) on the website.

### 2. *How do I apply for a Synergy Initiative grant?*

When the grant cycle is open, the Synergy Initiative application process begins with a Letter of Intent (LOI) followed by a full application proposal for those organizations invited to apply. When the next grant cycle opens, an announcement will be made via the Foundation's e-newsletter and application guidelines and related deadlines for submission will be posted on the website.

### 3. *Are Foundation staff willing to discuss my eligibility, LOI, or proposal prior to submission?*

Yes, we strongly encourage applicants to consult with Foundation staff in advance of the LOI deadline and to include potential project partners in the consultation.

### 4. *Are organizations with pending 501 (c) 3 tax status eligible to apply?*

Only organizations that are verified with a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) designation, as determined by the Internal Revenue Service, those operating under a fiscal sponsor with verified tax-exempt status, and government entities are eligible to apply.

### 5. *What is a fiscal sponsor and/or how do I find a fiscal sponsor for my program or project?*

A fiscal sponsor is a tax-exempt nonprofit organization that provides fiduciary oversight, financial management, and other administrative services to help build the capacity of unincorporated coalitions or groups, or incorporated organizations that are not tax-exempt. For those looking for a fiscal sponsor or considering serving as a fiscal sponsor, the [National Council on Nonprofits](#) website has a list of useful resources.

**6. *What is the average grant size for Synergy Initiative projects?***

Projects generally progress from planning to pilot to full implementation over the course of five years, typically, with continuation grant requests considered on an annual basis. Project budgets vary for each phase, and total grant amounts average approximately \$2 million per project over the grant period.

**7. *How are requests for Synergy Initiative projects evaluated?***

Applications are carefully reviewed by Foundation staff and Directors and evaluated based on the criteria detailed on the website.

**8. *Do I need to find my own project Evaluator?***

No, the Foundation facilitates a process through which you will identify an Evaluator for the project. Once a project team has been notified that they have been invited to submit a full proposal for a Synergy Initiative grant, they participate in a “speed dating” event with a pool of evaluators, recruited by the Foundation. Through this event, applicants and evaluators indicate their respective interest in potential partnerships. Matched evaluators will then work with applicants in preparing the planning grant application.

**9. *Does The Health Foundation allow part of an award to pay for indirect costs?***

It is the policy of the Foundation to encourage applicants to detail, as direct costs, realistic projections of overhead costs. Alternatively, the Foundation will allow up to 10% of the total direct costs for the reimbursement of indirect costs for Synergy Initiative projects. The calculation of indirect costs should NOT include subcontracting arrangements, capital improvements (including renovation and purchase), and equipment purchases.

**10. *Is it helpful to reach out to Foundation Directors directly to discuss a proposal?***

It is strongly recommended that all questions be directed to Foundation staff.