

## Request for Services (RFS)

### Early Childhood Organizational Partnership Development

<b>Issue Date:</b>	January 6, 2025
<b>Submission Deadline:</b>	February 3, 2025
<b>Contractor Selection:</b>	April 2025
<b>Contract Duration:</b>	June 2025 – September 2027 (28 months)
<b>Response Format:</b>	Electronic submission via online application portal
<b>Contact:</b>	<a href="mailto:info@bcbsncfoundation.org">info@bcbsncfoundation.org</a>

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### Opportunity Overview

#### Summary

The Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina Foundation (Foundation) is launching a new initiative to explore how best to promote and support collaboration across North Carolina’s landscape of early childhood advocacy organizations. A new capacity building funding opportunity is planned for Spring 2025 to identify pairs of organizations working to advance policy change in North Carolina’s early care and education system that are interested in forming partnerships with one another to align their work. The Foundation requests the services of a consultant to help us support collaboration and partnership development among these pairs of organizations to increase alignment and coordination and strengthen the potential for overall impact on the state’s policy environment. The contractor will engage three pairs (six grantee organizations) through tailored supports that can include facilitation, technical assistance, and skill building that enhances grantee capacity for collaboration. The contractor will also serve as a thought partner to the Foundation on the selection process of the six organizations and on initiative strategy as we explore, learn from, and adapt this strategy over time. Up to \$175,000 is available for this work.

#### Key Services

Key services will include:

- Thought partnership and consultation on the Foundation's strategy and approach to the grantee selection process for this initiative.

- Strategy support to the Foundation on learnings and potential pivots as the initiative unfolds.
- Grantee partnership development support, including development of a tailored set of activities with each pair of grantees to facilitate the development of strong, collaborative relationships in alignment with grantee interests, goals, and capacity.
- Ongoing grantee partnership technical assistance, including the development of aligned skill building opportunities and conflict resolution support.

### **Desired Skills & Experience**

Strong applicants will demonstrate the following:

- Experience with and/or knowledge of the early childhood policy advocacy landscape.
- Extensive experience and expertise in supporting partnership development and conflict resolution.
- Strong group facilitation and communication skills.
- Demonstrated ability to cultivate relationships with diverse leaders, staff, and organizations, including grassroots and community-based organizations.
- Systems orientation with an understanding of the barriers and power imbalances that impede partnerships in the nonprofit sector.
- Expertise in coalition building, collective impact, and/or strategic planning.
- Flexibility and adaptability, comfort with emergent learning approach.
- Commitment to, and experience with, applying an equity lens to the work.
- Demonstrated understanding of the dynamics between nonprofit and philanthropic sectors.

**Note:** Pre-submission inquiries regarding this opportunity may be addressed via email to [info@bcbsncfoundation.org](mailto:info@bcbsncfoundation.org) by January 15, 2025. Additionally, interested applicants may schedule a consultation call during pre-determined time slots [here](#).

## Opportunity Detail

### Background

The Foundation's early childhood investments focus on transforming the early care and education system in North Carolina. We know that children, families, and the economy benefit from a robust early education system that includes quality, affordable child care that comprehensively meets the needs of both families and the early education workforce. Child care continues to be at the forefront of issues surfacing across the state. There is lack of [child care availability](#) which has exacerbated the [state's labor shortage](#); tuition is unaffordable for the majority of parents and [exceeds the cost of housing](#); and there is an early education staffing shortage due in large part to unlivable wages that average [\\$14/hour](#). Combined, these factors have led to [\\$5.65 billion in annual losses to the state's economy](#).

Recognizing that policy and public investment have not caught up to support children, families, and the early education workforce in today's environment, the Foundation began its early childhood strategy work three years ago with a series of initial investments in both grassroots and grassroots policy advocacy organizations and coalitions working to advance state and local policy change. Through these investments, we have learned that movement building requires a broad base of support and a coordinated ecosystem of organizations, efforts, and networks that leverage multiple strategies of influence from grassroots to grassroots; that collaboration is key to knitting together disparate parts of the advocacy landscape; and that effective collaboration takes time and support. We have also learned that competition for funding, differing priorities and tactics, organizational leadership turnover, and limited organizational capacity have contributed to siloing and fragmentation among the many organizations working to improve and change the state's early childhood system. Fragmentation and a lack of coordination is commonly cited by stakeholders as a barrier to advancing policy change.

In response, the Foundation is seeking to support collaboration capacity among North Carolina's early education policy and advocacy organizations through a new funding opportunity that will identify three pairs (six organizations) that are interested in partnering together on state level early education policy advocacy. Prospective grantees will identify their partner organization and apply together. We anticipate that some or all pairs will include a mixture of grassroots and grassroots organizations or coalitions. Grants will be \$150,000 per organization for two years and are intended to resource staff time and certain activities to support their partnership development. Grant funding is not intended to support joint programming or other program activities. These investments will occur through an open funding opportunity, separate from this request for services, with an anticipated release in spring 2025.

Effective partnerships often benefit from a neutral facilitator and support partner to create space for articulating shared language, values, and goals across partners; to assist with navigating and resolving conflicts; and to support development of written agreements that establish the foundation of partnerships. The contractor identified through this RFS will serve as

a cornerstone of support for grantees as they embark on new collaborations and as a strategic thought partner to the Foundation.

### **Description of Services Requested**

The Foundation is seeking a contractor to serve as a support partner for up to three pairs of grantees (six organizations total) to be identified through a new funding opportunity that aims to support collaboration and partnership development among organizations working to advance state level policy change in North Carolina's early care and education system. The contractor will serve as a neutral facilitator and technical assistance provider to each pair of organizations to strengthen their collaboration capacity in the early care and education policy advocacy field. In addition, the contractor will serve as a thought partner to the Foundation on the funding opportunity and grantee selection process and will uplift insights and learnings on the strategy as the initiative unfolds. This initiative is a new approach we are using to explore and learn from how best to support and promote collaboration across the many early childhood advocacy efforts underway across the state. As such, we expect to adapt the strategy and approach to grantee support as learning emerges.

We anticipate that the services will be more time intensive in year one. We also expect that the services will be provided in a mixture of virtual and in person settings, depending on grantee preferences. Specific components of the scope of work and contractor role include:

#### **Grantee Partnership Development**

- Facilitation support to refine grantees' shared partnership goals and strategies.
- In collaboration with grantees, development of a tailored set of activities for each pair of grantees to facilitate the development of strong, collaborative relationships in alignment with grantee interests, goals, and capacity.
- Facilitation of the development of grantee partnership agreements that document agreed upon values, ways of working, and roles.
- Managing the scheduling and planning of meetings with grantee partners.

#### **Ongoing Partnership Technical Assistance**

- Identification of grantee skill-building needs related to collaboration and addressing those needs through individual or group opportunities as appropriate (e.g., consensus building, group process, effective communication).
- Identification of tools and strategies that grantees may leverage to support their collaborative work and coaching grantees on their use.
- Assistance for grantees with conflict management and resolution including development of an agreed upon conflict management process, and provision of neutral facilitation.

#### **Strategy Support**

- Thought partnership for the Foundation during the grantee selection process to identify the six organizations.

- Ongoing identification and sharing of insights, learnings, and potential pivots as the initiative unfolds.

### **Work and Deliverables/Project Scope**

- Written quarterly reports and monthly check-in calls with Foundation staff to share grantee progress, emergent themes, and lessons learned.
- In collaboration with grantees, development of a tailored set of activities for each pair of grantees to facilitate the development of a strong, collaborative relationship in alignment with grantee interests, goals, and capacity.
- Development of a written partnership agreement for each pair of grantees that outlines agreed upon values, ways of working, shared goals, and roles.
- Identification of grantee skill-building needs and provision of learning opportunities that advance grantee collaboration.
- Regular connections with grantee pairs (cadence to be further defined) and with individual grantees as needed.

### **Desired Skills, Qualities, and Attributes**

- Experience with and/or knowledge of the early childhood policy advocacy landscape.
- Extensive experience and expertise in supporting partnership development and conflict resolution.
- Strong group facilitation and communication skills.
- Demonstrated ability to cultivate relationships with diverse leaders, staff, and organizations, including grassroots and community-based organizations.
- Systems orientation with an understanding of the barriers and power imbalances that impede partnerships in the non-profit sector.
- Expertise in coalition building, collective impact, and/or strategic planning.
- Flexibility and adaptability, comfort with emergent learning approach.
- Commitment to and experience applying an equity lens to the work.
- Demonstrated understanding of the dynamics between nonprofit and philanthropic sectors.

## Timeline

Deadline or Activity	
Request for Services Released	January 6
Pre-Application Consultations	January 8 – January 15
Applicant Questions Due	January 15
Responses to Applicant Questions {Posted on Website}	January 21
Proposals Due	February 3
Proposal Review <i>(The Foundation may reach out with follow-up questions and/or to clarify aspects of the proposal)</i>	February 4 – February 14
Finalist Interviews	March 3 – March 14
Finalist Notification	April 7
Contract Development & Refining of Deliverables/scope of work	April 11 – May 15
Contract Start	June 1
Grantee Selection Process	June 1 – July 31
Grants Awarded	August 15
Partnership Support Initiated	September 2
Contract Close	September 30, 2027

## Submission

### Proposal Requirements

Please include the following materials in your proposal:

#### 1. Proposal narrative

- a. **Values.** Describe the values that guide your work and how they show up in the way you approach your work.
- b. **Approach to services.** Please describe your proposed approach to the work, including:

- i. The methods you would use to develop a tailored partnership support experience for each grantee pair, including how you would co-design the experience with grantees.
- ii. How you would approach developing and delivering skill-building opportunities.
- iii. How you would approach navigating conflict between partners.
- iv. How you would plan for and structure sense-making opportunities with the Foundation.
- v. How you would approach the timing and pacing of key activities over the contract period. We anticipate the grantee selection process will take two months and that partnership support services will begin shortly following the grant awards. Grant awards will be for two years.

*Note that the timeline, deliverables, and scope of work will be refined with the finalist during the contracting period.*

- 2. Organizational history, experience, and qualifications for this project.** Describe your organization's experience and qualifications that align with the desired skills, qualities, and attributes outlined above. Please include information regarding the proposed project lead and team members and relevant experience.
- 3. Cost proposal.** Up to \$175,000 is available for this work, aside from travel and language access services, if needed. 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.

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. We will not contact references until the finalist stage.

*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 our 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; 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 on our language access process during vendor onboarding.*

### **Pre-Application Inquiries**

Pre-submission inquiries regarding this opportunity may be addressed via email to [info@bcbsncfoundation.org](mailto:info@bcbsncfoundation.org) by January 15, 2025. Additionally, interested applicants may schedule a 15-minute consultation call during pre-determined time slots in January [here](#). Consultation calls are optional.

### **Submission and Deadline**

Please submit your proposal [here](#) by 11:59pm on February 3, 2025.

### **Proposal Review & Evaluation**

Proposals will be reviewed based on the requirements of this RFS. A preliminary review will be completed by Foundation staff. Finalist interviews will allow for conversations to take place regarding submitted proposals and will help to round out the understanding of approach and experience. We anticipate a decision by April 2025.

### **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 Foundation**

The Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina Foundation is a private, charitable foundation with the mission of improving the health and well-being of everyone in North Carolina. Since our founding in 2000, more than \$243 million has been invested into North Carolina communities through more than 1,500 grants. In our grantmaking, we strive to address the key drivers of health, and we take a flexible approach designed to meet identified needs in partnership with the community. We also work closely with our grantees, and other nonprofits, to support their growth through capacity building, training, and leadership development opportunities. Learn more at [bcbsncfoundation.org](https://bcbsncfoundation.org).