

## Funding Opportunity

# Community-level Approaches to Supporting Youth Mental Health and Resilience

<b>Issue Date:</b>	January 7, 2025
<b>Submission Deadline:</b>	February 4, 2025
<b>Grant Funding Decisions:</b>	Late June/Early July 2025
<b>Contact:</b>	<a href="mailto:info@bcbsncfoundation.org">info@bcbsncfoundation.org</a>

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## Opportunity Overview

### Summary

Young people who have connections to caring adults, a positive sense of self, and are situated in environments with resources and supports they can access when needed, are best positioned to successfully navigate life's challenges, and have good mental health outcomes. Community conditions are primary factors in youth well-being, and community-based approaches that center and promote youth mental health provide significant opportunities to fortify connectedness, resilience, and overall well-being.

This funding opportunity is aimed at identifying and supporting cross-sector, collaborative, community-based, and youth-centered/led approaches that improve conditions to support youth and foster resilience, life skills, and positive coping strategies which impact overall mental health.

Blue Cross NC Foundation will invest in up to eight experienced, youth-serving cross-sector, community-based collaboratives that will engage and center youth in the development, implementation, and advancement of initiatives aimed at improving conditions that support youth mental health and well-being. Funding is to support partnerships that address community conditions that promote resilience and mental health and not clinical services specifically. Applicants should have strong prior experience elevating youth leadership as reflected in youth's engagement in the design, implementation, and evaluation of existing initiatives. Collaboratives that have within their partnership, mental health providers, mental health education, and/or advocacy organizations will receive priority consideration.

For this initiative, we are prioritizing grantmaking in areas of western North Carolina impacted by Hurricane Helene and areas of economic distress in other parts of the state. This includes applicants located in the [Major Disaster Declaration Area](#) and organizations in counties recognized as [Tier 1](#) by the North Carolina Department of Commerce, and organizations serving communities at the sub-county level with similar economic conditions to Tier 1 counties. Applicants from counties outside the Major Disaster Declaration Area or Tier 1 counties should describe the economic conditions of the community in their preliminary application. Grantees will receive up to \$150,000 per year for three years (up to \$450,000 total per organization).

## Grant Activities: Description of Funded Work

Organizations receiving funding will work over the grant period to:

- **Identify and integrate approaches that promote youth mental health and well-being in the places that young people occupy.** This may include collaborative efforts that elevate an intentional focus on youth mental health within youth serving organizations and programs, school-settings, parent and/or youth organizations, and faith-based programming, among others.
- **Expand and deepen local networks and cross-sector collaboratives that are centered on youth mental health.** This may include efforts to initiate and/or mobilize youth, parents and trusted adults, schools, clinical providers, and youth serving organizations in the development of community approaches to better support youth mental health and to ensure clear pathways for prevention, intervention, and treatment when needed.
- **Promote and integrate services and supports that build capacity for fostering resilience in youth** such as through exposures to skill-based learning. This may be for example, the development, co-design, and delivery of curricula, activities, evidence-based programming, and/or other strategies associated with good mental health.
- **Participate in learning and communications activities to reflect on and share their experience with other communities interested in achieving similar goals.** This could include shared learning opportunities with the full cohort of grantees funded as part of this initiative and sharing experience with the field.

## Learning and Technical Assistance

Organizations receiving grant funding will be supported by the following:

- Shared learning opportunities with the full cohort of grantees funded as part of this initiative, including convenings.
- Regular technical assistance opportunities to support the implementation of the proposed work. This includes access to subject matter experts, coaching, and a range of other supports; the type and frequency of engagement will be determined with grantees.

## Eligibility, Prior Experience, and Organizational Characteristics

- Located in a Hurricane Helene-impacted county in western North Carolina ([Major Disaster Declaration Area](#)) or within an area of economic distress in other parts of the state (e.g., in a [Tier 1 county](#) or in a sub-county community with similar economic characteristics).
- Have a youth-serving/youth-centered community-based organization as the lead applicant.
- Have an existing and active cross-sector coalition/collaborative that has partnered on advancing other youth and/or health related issues in community. Although the intent of this work is to focus on community conditions that promote resilience and mental health, collaboratives that have within their network, mental health providers, mental health education, and/or advocacy organizations will receive priority consideration.
- Have a history of engaging in partnerships with networks, youth-serving organizations, parents and trusted adults, schools and/or other services and systems that engage and serve youth.
- Have existing ways of elevating youth leadership as reflected in youth's engagement in the design, implementation, and evaluation of programmatic initiatives.

Applications from eligible organizations will be reviewed by Foundation staff and external reviewers with particular attention to the following elements:

- The composition, history, and track record of the collaborative advancing similar work within communities.
- Clearly articulated and relevant strategies for ensuring that youth leadership is centered and elevated in all aspects of the proposed project.
- The alignment and overall feasibility of the proposed project/approach to the aims of the funding opportunity and the expressed community needs.

## **Application Process**

The application is currently available in English; other languages are available upon request. To request application materials in a language other than English, please complete [this form](#). The turnaround time for these materials is three to five days, therefore the last day to make this request is January 21, 2025. Applicants will have the opportunity to submit questions via email prior to the application deadline. To do so, please email [info@bcbsncfoundation.org](mailto:info@bcbsncfoundation.org) January 21, 2025. Questions will be captured with collective responses posted to our website as an FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) document.

### *Part 1: Stage 1 Application by February 4, 2025*

Organizations seeking funding through this opportunity must complete an online application, which includes basic organizational information, identification of collaborative partners, and your prior experience together including with youth leadership, as well as brief question prompts about your proposed project.

### *Part 2: Full Proposal by April 22, 2025 (by invitation)*

A smaller group of organizations will be selected based on review of the stage 1 application to follow up with a full proposal to more fully describe the collaborative's proposed work, youth engagement strategies, and roles of cross-sector partners.

### *Part 3: Finalist Conversations June 2- June 13, 2025*

A group of finalists will be selected to participate in a virtual conversation with the review team; specific questions will be shared with finalists before these conversations.

### *Part 4: Notification Late June/Early July 2025*

Applicants who are not moving forward in the process will be notified at each stage. Selected grantees will be notified by late June/early July 2025.

*See pages to follow for additional detail and context related to this funding opportunity, as well as specifics on how to apply.*

## Opportunity Detail

While some young people are able to successfully navigate the ages and stages of their development and its inherent challenges, far too many in North Carolina are suffering from mental health difficulties – resulting in depression, anxiety, self-harm, and suicide. Many factors and considerations impact youth mental health and there are clear disparities in mental health outcomes across populations. Youth living in rural areas are at greater risk of suicide than those living in urban settings, and socioeconomically disadvantaged youth are two to three times more likely to develop mental health conditions than peers with higher socioeconomic status. Girls, LGBTQ+ youth, Black, Latine, American Indian, Asian American and Pacific Islander, and other youth of color have higher rates of mental health disorder challenges than other youth.

The conditions in community settings in which youth live are primary factors that impact their mental health. These same settings offer significant opportunities to more intentionally support youth engagement and the cultivation of life skills, critical connections, and resilience that can lead to success in life, success in education, and overall good health and well-being. When young people live in safe neighborhoods, attend schools and programs where they feel safe and supported, and have connections to positive peers, family members and trusted adults, they are better able to successfully navigate life's challenges. In the places that young people occupy – such as within family and community settings, schools, health and medical care, youth serving and out-of-school-time organizations and programs, and faith-based organizations – there are opportunities to effectively engage and support youth through community connections.

When different kinds of youth serving organizations work together through cross-sector collaboration, it provides a powerful opportunity to activate and advance issues that impact youth. Their unique configurations, with various types of partners, can mobilize networks of support that can ultimately achieve changes in the community conditions that support good mental health. Collaboratives that center and elevate youth can provide critical opportunities for youth leadership and for them to contribute in ways that ensure that their insight and ideas are reflected. When young people are engaged and have a voice in identifying issues and ways to solve problems that reflect their input, they are more likely to accept and adopt solutions.

### Eligibility, Prior Experience, and Selection Criteria

Funding from this initiative will enhance the work of existing cross-sector collaboratives – that feature a community-based organization as the lead applicant – with a demonstrated track record and long-standing commitment to ongoing youth engagement and partnerships with networks, youth-serving organizations, parents and trusted adults, schools and/or other services and systems that engage, serve, and center youth.

In order to be considered for grant funding, applicants must meet the following:

- Have a community-based, youth serving/youth centered organization as the lead applicant.
- Be located in and serve communities within the Major Disaster Declaration for Hurricane Helene ([Major Disaster Declaration Area](#)) OR a North Carolina Department of Commerce Tier 1 County ([Tier 1](#)), or sub-county level communities with economic conditions similar to Tier 1 located in other parts of the state.

- Have an existing and active cross-sector coalition/collaborative that has partnered on advancing other youth and/or health related issues in community; understanding that the intent of this work is to focus on community conditions that promote resilience and mental health. For the purposes of this opportunity, cross-sector collaboratives are partnerships that bring together organizations and stakeholders from different fields or sectors to address complex challenges collectively. These sectors may include education, health care, mental health, social services, government, faith-based organizations, community groups, businesses, and others that directly or indirectly support youth well-being. Collaboratives that have within their network, mental health providers and/or mental health education and/or advocacy organizations will also receive priority consideration.
- Have a demonstrated track record of serving youth that are most impacted by poor mental health outcomes; ongoing youth engagement and partnerships with networks, youth-serving organizations, parents and trusted adults, schools and/or other services and systems that engage and serve youth.
- Have within the collaborative, existing structures, strategies, and approaches that center and elevate youth leadership reflected by youth’s active involvement in decision-making processes and leadership roles in the design, implementation, and evaluation of programmatic initiatives.

Organization Size

There is no minimum organizational budget requirement. Organizations of all sizes are eligible to apply.

Organization Type

**Nonprofit organization** that is exempt under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code and is classified as “not a private foundation” under Section 509(a).

- OR -

**Fiscally sponsored program** – A group or project with a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization acting as a fiscal sponsor. Please note that the fiscal sponsor is considered the grantee and is responsible for all legal aspects of the project including reporting and financial management.

Applications from eligible organizations will be reviewed by Foundation staff and external reviewers with particular attention to the following elements:

- The composition, history, and track record of the collaborative advancing similar work within communities.
- Clearly articulated and relevant strategies for ensuring that youth leadership is centered and elevated in all aspects of the proposed project.
- The alignment and overall feasibility of the proposed project/approach to the aims of the funding opportunity and the expressed community needs.

## Grant Activities: Description of the Funded Work

This funding opportunity is aimed at identifying and supporting cross-sector, collaborative, community-based, and youth-centered/led approaches that improve conditions to support youth and foster resilience, life skills, and positive coping strategies which impact overall good mental health.

Organizations receiving funding will work over the grant period to:

- **Identify and integrate approaches that promote youth mental health and well-being in the places that young people occupy.** This may include collaborative efforts that elevate an intentional focus on youth mental health within youth serving organizations and programs, school-settings, parent and/or youth organizations, and faith-based programming, among others.
- **Expand and deepen local networks and cross-sector collaboratives that are centered on youth mental health.** This may include efforts to initiate and/or mobilize youth, parents and trusted adults, schools, clinical providers, and youth serving organizations in the development of community approaches to better support youth mental health and to ensure clear pathways for prevention, intervention, and treatment when needed. Community education efforts that elevate awareness of and advocacy for youth mental health may also emerge.
- **Promote and integrate services and supports that build capacity for fostering resilience in youth** through exposures to skill-based learning. This may be the development, co-design, and delivery of curricula, activities, evidence-based programming, and or other strategies associated with good mental health.
- **Participate in learning and communications activities to reflect on and share their experience with other communities interested in achieving similar goals.** This could include shared learning opportunities with the full cohort of grantees funded as part of this initiative and sharing experience with the field.

**Grant funding of up to \$150,000 per year, for three years is available.** Funding may support, among other things: staff time, training, youth programming, services, and supports, compensation for youth and community member time (recruitment and retention), materials, language support, and other tools for youth and community engagement.

### Examples of Types of Funded Work:

*Please note, the following examples are intended to be illustrative and not exhaustive.*

- Your organization provides afterschool programming that focuses on leadership development and other culturally relevant programming, academic, and social supports for youth in a low resourced community. The organization is a part of a long-standing cross-sector coalition that implements an annual anti-bullying campaign; the coalition includes youth leaders, school counselors, parent organizations, and mental health providers and advocates. The coalition has an interest in broadening the scope of their current education and awareness efforts to have a deepened, more intentional focus on impacting youth mental health outcomes.
- Your organization sponsors and supports a Youth Leadership Council - a demographically diverse group of students from several local high schools within your county. Your organization provides ongoing training on civic engagement and advocacy, and through your partnership with the local

schools, parent organizations, and the County Commissioners Office. The Youth Leadership Council has a current and structured platform to share their ideas about issues impacting them and recommendations for solutions to the Commissioners and other decision-makers in the county. The Youth Leadership Council has currently elevated mental health as a pressing concern, particularly in the disparities and differences their peers are experiencing in getting the support and help they need. While your organization and the Youth Leadership Council have not previously worked on mental health, you have identified a community partner that focuses on mental health awareness and promotion, as well as clinical service providers who are interested in joining the existing collaborative that is seeking to organize formally county-wide to better address youth mental health needs.

**Please note: Blue Cross NC Foundation funding cannot be earmarked for, or directly support, lobbying\*, lobbying related activities, and/or partisan activities.**

### Grantee Experience

In addition to funding, grantees will be invited to participate in additional opportunities for the purposes of peer support, learning, and collaboration. Examples include:

- Shared learning opportunities with the full cohort of grantees funded as part of this initiative, including annual convenings.
- Regular technical assistance opportunities to support the implementation of the proposed work. This includes access to subject matter experts, coaching, and a range of other supports; service type and frequency of engagement will be determined with grantees.
- Language access support will be provided in technical assistance and cohort activities as needed to support the full engagement of participants.

### Learning and Evaluation

Throughout the grant term, the Foundation may engage an external partner to help us understand what we are learning and identify insights to share with the field. This learning will inform our ongoing efforts related to youth mental health and supplement what grantees may be learning through their own internal evaluation efforts. The information will not be used for performance management or as criteria for future funding. Any future learning and evaluation partner will be selected after projects are identified. Please plan to spend approximately one hour per month participating in any learning and evaluation activities. This may include individual activities, engaging with the external partner, or cross-learning with other grantees. We anticipate learning will focus on exploring what it takes to:

- Expand networks and cross-sector partnerships that are centering and working on specific strategies to advance youth mental health, connectedness, and resilience in communities served.
- Effectively implement ideas and approaches co-designed/led by youth in community to address community conditions impacting youth well-being.
- Increase capacity of organizations to support the cultivation of youth resilience and connectedness through expanded opportunities for life skills training, positive coping strategies, and overall positive youth development fortified with strong family and community connections.

## Funding Partnership Commitment

As a partner with our grantees throughout this work, our Foundation commits to:

- Active engagement with grantees with a focus on listening to understand.
- Support grantees to achieve their goals and to adapt to new or unexpected circumstances.
- Solicit, and be open to, direct, constructive feedback about our approach to, and implementation of, this project and specific opportunities to change course and adapt.
- Provide timely communication about any changes or updates that might impact grantees.
- Operate in consistency with our organizational values working to assure that everyone in North Carolina has the opportunity to be as healthy as possible.

## How to Learn More

**Ask Questions (optional):** Organizations interested in this opportunity are encouraged to submit questions about the funding opportunity by January 21, 2025 to [info@bcbsncfoundation.org](mailto:info@bcbsncfoundation.org). An FAQ will be posted to the Foundation website by the week of January 27, 2025.

## How to Apply

This is a three-part application process. Only those selected to advance will be asked to submit additional materials at each stage. Outlined below is the full process which includes an anticipated timeline and guidance on potential next steps.

*Part 1: Preliminary Proposal by February 4, 2025.*

*Part 2: Full Proposal by April 22, 2025 (invited applicants only)*

*Part 3: (Virtual) Finalist Conversations June 2 – 13, 2025 (invited finalists only)*

### Part 1:

**Preliminary Proposal: Submit by February 4, 2025:** Applicants seeking funding through this opportunity must complete an [Online Application](#), including answering the questions outlined below as well as providing additional basic organizational information. This application is currently available in English with other languages available upon request. To request application materials in a language other than English, please complete [this form](#). The turnaround time for these materials is three to five days, therefore the last day to make this request is January 21, 2025.

The overall proposal narrative is limited to 5 total pages, to be completed as indicated in the narrative format document. Please use the narrative template ([linked here](#) and within the online application), placing each response under its corresponding question.

**Application Questions:** Answers to the following will be submitted as part of the online application process.

1. Please indicate which of the following geographic designations apply to the community in which you are located and serving:
  - [Major Disaster Declaration Area](#)
  - [Tier 1](#)



- Counties outside the Major Disaster Declaration Area or Tier 1
      - If you check this designation, please provide data describing the comparable economic conditions of your community:
- 2. Please provide an organizational description of the lead applicant which must be a youth serving/youth-centered organization. This description should highlight your mission, vision, and describe your youth programming. It should also include a list and description of the partners in the collaborative. In your description of the collaborative, please identify who is in the partnership, their roles, and what have they done together in the last two years.

*Please note that the Foundation is also requesting a letter of engagement from each of the collaborative partners listed if you are invited to advance to the next stage. A letter of engagement is intended to allow each partner identified to confirm their intention to work with the lead community-based organization in the manner described.*

- 3. Briefly describe the ways in which your organization and/or the collaborative engage youth in the design and implementation of programmatic initiatives. Talk about how your approach to youth engagement centers and elevates their leadership.
- 4. What does the collaborative want to work on and why? Please provide a brief description of the proposed work for which you are requesting funding. In other words: What is your vision for success and what do you propose to do to achieve it?

## **Part 2:**

**Full Proposal by April 22, 2025:** A smaller group of organizations will be selected from the initial submission to follow up with a full proposal designed to provide more insight into the organization's proposed work, youth engagement strategies, and roles of cross-sector partners. The proposal questions will be made available to selected applicants via an online application. Proposals will be reviewed by a team of Foundation staff and external reviewers.

The following type of information is expected to be the basis for the Part 2 submission; they may change slightly based on our Part 1 review and therefore are provided for illustrative purposes only. Please do not submit responses to these with a Part 1 application.

- A description of the opportunities in your community to cultivate youth resilience and connectedness through expanded opportunities for life skills training, leadership, positive coping strategies, and overall positive youth development fortified with strong family, peer, and community connections.
- How the proposed program and/or approach will address the identified opportunities to build capacity for fostering resilience and good mental health and overall well-being.
- How you anticipate this work unfolding over the next three years - the phases of work, anticipated milestones, related objectives, the roles/responsibilities of the collaborative and other relevant partners, and information about the setting/where this initiative will be "housed."
- A program budget for the proposed work. A sample template will be provided, or you can use your own format. Funding may support among other things, staff time, training, youth

programming, youth services and supports, compensation/stipends for youth and community member time, incentives for recruitment and retention, materials, and other tools for youth and community engagement.

- Describe the demographics of the youth this project will engage and serve. Highlight any specific approaches or initiatives that you are working on that are tailored to and inclusive of young people most impacted by disparities in mental health outcomes such as adolescent girls, LGBTQ+ youth, Black, Latine, American Indian, Asian American and Pacific Islander or other youth of color, and youth in low wealth and/or rural communities.

**Part 3: Finalist Conversations - June 2 – June 13, 2025**

Based on application reviews, a group of finalists will be selected to participate in a virtual conversation with the review team; specific questions will be shared with finalists before these conversations.

**Notification:** Applicants who participated in the full proposal submission and virtual conversation will be notified (acceptance or declination) in an ongoing fashion with final decisions for grantees anticipated by late June/early July 2025.

**Timeline**

Deadline or Activity	
Funding opportunity released; application open	January 7, 2025
Translation request deadline Submission of any questions about the funding opportunity	January 21, 2025
FAQ posted	Week of January 27, 2025
Initial applications due	February 4, 2025
Notification to applicants invited to submit a full application; declination letters sent	March 24, 2025
Full applications due	April 22, 2025
Advancing finalists notified	May 20, 2025
Finalist conversations	June 2 – June 13, 2025
Grantees selected and notified	Late June/Early July 2025

## Questions

For questions about this funding opportunity, the application submission process, or to discuss alternate submission arrangements other than the Foundation's online application portal, contact [info@bcbsncfoundation.org](mailto:info@bcbsncfoundation.org).

## Key Terms

Within the context of this funding opportunity, the following definitions of key terms are provided below.

**Community-based organization:** A nonprofit organization that works to address local needs and improve the well-being of its residents. CBOs are often trusted entities within their communities and can mobilize community members around shared goals. They can be associated with a particular area of concern or segment of the community.

**Cross-sector collaboratives:** Partnerships that bring together organizations and stakeholders from different fields or sectors to address complex challenges collectively. These sectors may include education, health care, mental health, social services, government, faith-based organizations, community groups, businesses, and others that directly or indirectly support youth well-being.

**Lobbying:** The IRS defines lobbying as communication with a legislator that expresses a view about specific legislation. Grassroots lobbying is defined as communication with the public that expresses a view about specific legislation and includes a call to action. Foundations are limited by the IRS in supporting lobbying, and grant dollars may not be earmarked for lobbying in your budget.

**Youth serving organization:** organization that works directly with and on behalf of youth, providing programs, services, supports, that address their developmental needs as well as opportunities to cultivate their leadership.

**Youth centered:** engaging and prioritizing youth in a manner that focuses on their active input, insights, and perspectives in decision-making.

## About the 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 \$245 million into North Carolina through more than 1,500 grants, collaborations, and special initiatives. Learn more at [bcbsncfoundation.org](http://bcbsncfoundation.org)