

Minnesota Public Health Infrastructure Fund Request for Applications (RFA)

This application itself will reside in REDCap; you can find information about this funding opportunity and the application questions below for your reference and planning purposes.

Important dates

2 September 2024	Request for applications (RFA) released.
20 September 2024	Optional Informational webinar at 12:00 p.m.
7 October 2024	Optional Office Hours for Q&A from 2:00 – 3:30p.m.
6 November 2024	Optional informational webinar at 1:00 pm
18 November 2024	Optional Office Hours for Q&A from 2:00 – 3:30 p.m.
20 November 2024	Last day to submit email questions about the RFA.
22 November 2024	Last Q&A update posted.
3 December 2024	Proposals due (until 11:59 p.m.).
1 April 2025	Estimated start date for projects.

Purpose

The purpose of these funds is to identify new ways for Minnesota’s public health system to fulfill Foundational Public Health Responsibilities by supporting and learning from projects that **test new delivery models and/or processes that have the potential to benefit multiple jurisdictions**. In order to do this, applicants will be expected to partner with other entities (e.g., other counties, CHBs, or tribes) outside of their own jurisdiction. For this application, jurisdiction is defined as a Community Health Board (CHB) or Tribal Nation.

This funding is just one element of Minnesota’s journey to modernize and strengthen the public health system. Part of the way we strengthen our system is to implement system change. This grant program exists to look systematically at innovative ways to deliver foundational public health responsibilities. These projects will generate valuable insights about how to best fund and structure Minnesota’s statewide public health system for the 21st century.

Background

In its 2021 session, the Minnesota Legislature passed a budget that included \$6 million annually for the Commissioner of Health to provide funding for community health boards and tribal governments to build foundational public health capacity across the state and pilot new organizational models.

The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) consulted with the State Community Health Services Advisory Committee (SCHSAC) in the fall of 2021 and winter of 2022 before releasing the first round of grants. Sixteen community health boards received funding in round one. In 2023, SCHSAC, informed by the [Joint Leadership Team](#), approved recommendations for the

second round of grant funding. The second round of funding is currently supporting thirteen projects (6 continuing projects and 7 new projects).

In order to encourage a wide distribution of funds across the state and across foundational areas, this Request for Applications (RFA) outlines specific project scopes and service areas that MDH is interested in funding in this next cycle. The purpose of these funds is outlined above, while the other items are outlined below.

Funding availability

\$6 million/year is available to support Minnesota Public Health Infrastructure Projects.

New projects will be funded for two years (April 1, 2025-March 31, 2027) with a two-year renewal option. Award amounts are likely to range between \$100,000 - \$400,000/year, but applicants are encouraged to apply for the funds they need to ensure a successful project. Current Minnesota Public Health Infrastructure fund grantees, meaning those with active grant agreements, can only apply for continuing funding if they are in year one or two of funding. Projects in year 3 are not eligible for continued funding; the application would need to be for a new innovation project.

Applicants must submit budget estimates for year 1 (April 1, 2025- March 31, 2026) and year 2 (April 1, 2026- March 31, 2027) of the grant period. See the 'grant budgets' section below for more information. **Final funding amounts will be negotiated during the granting process.**

Eligibility and other requirements

Eligible entities. Community health boards (CHBs) and Tribes are eligible to apply.

Scope. Funds will support projects within any Area or Capability in the [Foundational Public Health Responsibilities Framework](#).

In addition to proposals for cross jurisdictional innovation projects, MDH is interested in, and is soliciting proposals for, projects that:

- Replicate implementation of a regional data hub, using lessons learned from previously funded projects;
- Assess, plan, and/or implement a fully integrated, multi-county local health department across one or more Community Health Board(s); or
- Pilot a new Disease Intervention Specialist (DIS) delivery model exploring how to best leverage local, tribal, and regional resources to work collaboratively to reduce rates of HIV/STIs.

To promote an equitable distribution of funding across geography, we encourage applicants to submit proposals from Central Minnesota and Tribal Nations.

Application Requirements. Based on consultation with SCHSAC and informed by the Joint Leadership Team, applicants for funds are required to:

- Collaborate across jurisdictions (CHBs or Tribes)
- Demonstrate benefit to Minnesota’s public health system
- Demonstrate buy-in from others on how partner jurisdictions will benefit from the work
- Identify how proposed projects support the vision for a seamless, responsive, publicly supported public health system

Other Expectations. Selected grantees will be required to:

- Submit an initial project plan 8 weeks after effective date and adapt that plan throughout the course of the project, as conditions and information change
- Participate in regular check-ins with PHP staff by phone/video
- Participate in in-person and/or virtual grantee meetings, likely 2-4 times during the project period (plan for one in-person meeting/year)
- Be responsive to other PHP evaluation activities to be determined (e.g., occasional written reports, interviews, focus groups, or other activities)
- Share information about their work and their lessons learned with others
- Submit invoices quarterly

Grant Management. Each successful applicant will formally enter into a grant agreement. The grant agreement will address the conditions of the award, including implementation for the project. Grantee should read the grant agreement, sign, and once signed, comply with all conditions of the grant agreement.

No work on grant activities can begin until a fully signed grant agreement is in place and the State’s Authorized Representative has notified the Grantee that work may start.

The funded applicant will be legally responsible for assuring implementation of the work plan and compliance with all applicable state requirements including worker’s compensation insurance, nondiscrimination, data privacy, budget compliance, and reporting.

Grant Budgets. Applicants are required to submit budget estimates for both year 1 and year 2 of the grant period, as separate annual budgets. Instructions are embedded in the REDCap application.

Budgets will be negotiated during the granting process. Grantees should ask for the resources they need to support the proposed project, such as staff salaries, subcontracts, supplies, training, technology, and expenses related to supporting meaningful community engagement. Grantees will need to provide information about proposed subcontracts in accordance with the [Financial Guide for MDH Grants to Community Health Boards](#).

Ineligible Expenses:

- Solicitating donations
- Taxes, except sales tax on goods and services
- Lobbyists, political contributions
- Bad debts, late payment fees, finance charges, or contingency funds
- Cost of membership dues for state or national affiliated organizations

Please note:

- Grantees may revise their budgets as needed during the grant period. MDH recognizes that local conditions and circumstances change over time and project needs evolve. Budget revisions should be sent to the Center for Public Health Practice lead staff for approval and must be consistent with the goals of the project and the purpose for these funds.
- Budget revisions are required whenever there is a change of 10% or more in any line item. Grantees do not need prior approval to move funds that are less than 10% of a budget line item.
- There is no match requirement for this funding.

Evaluation. There are no specific performance metrics for these funds at this time. MDH's Center for Public Health Practice is interested in learning:

- What kinds of delivery models show promise assuring foundational public health responsibilities across Minnesota;
- How communities benefit from enhanced capacity of local public health departments;
- The scalability of different models; and
- The things that help advance or get in the way of system change, including, but not limited to:
 - Types of governance and/or organizational structures
 - Appropriate staffing levels
 - Bureaucratic and/or policy levers or barriers
 - Distribution of financial resources
 - Structures and strategies for collaboration and partnership
 - Community conditions
 - Particular aspects of administrative, business, or organizational infrastructure

Staff from the Center for Public Health Practice will provide regular coaching and technical assistance to support project teams throughout the grant period and will convene grantees to support the sharing of knowledge, skills, and lessons learned.

Applicants are encouraged to identify their own success measures and incorporate evaluation activities into their workplans.

Planning resources

Some helpful resources for thinking about potential projects and public health system transformation work in Minnesota include:

- [The Six Conditions of System Change Framework](#)
- [Two Loops of System Change Framework](#)
- [Transforming Minnesota's Public Health System for the 21st Century: Report to the Legislature](#)
- [Minnesota Public Health Cost and Capacity Assessment: Summative Report](#)
- [PHAB Center for Innovation](#), including case studies from the [21st Century Learning Community](#)
- Additional Minnesota [System Transformation Information and Resources](#)

Selection process

MDH will convene a broadly representative application review team that may include:

- A SCHSAC representative to the Joint Leadership Team
- An MDH representative to the Joint Leadership Team
- An LPHA representative to the Joint Leadership Team
- A representative from the Office of American Indian Health
- Local Public Health leaders and SCHSAC members from jurisdictions that are not applying for funds
- External partners with relevant knowledge and expertise

Evaluation criteria can be found on the [MN Public Health Infrastructure Fund website](#).

- In addition to application scores, funding decisions will take into consideration the benefit to the statewide public health system; geographic representation; variety of projects; and sizes/types of jurisdictions involved.
- MDH reserves the right to withhold the distribution of funds in cases where applications submitted do not meet the necessary criteria.
- MDH reserves the right to waive minor irregularities or request additional information to further clarify or validate information submitted in the application, provided the application, as submitted, substantially complies with the requirements outlined in this document.

- This application process does not obligate MDH to award a grant agreement or complete the project, and MDH reserves the right to cancel this application process if it is considered to be in its best interest.

Questions about this funding

MDH will offer two informational webinars for applicants where questions can be raised as well as two optional office hours for more informal Q&A. CHS Administrators and public health directors will receive links to these meetings via the CHS-PHN list. Tribal public health leaders will receive this information from the Office of American Indian Health. In addition, questions can be emailed to health.ophp@state.mn.us. Responses to emailed questions and recordings of the informational webinars will be posted on the [MN Infrastructure Fund website](#) and updated regularly. The last day questions can be submitted is November 20, 2024.

Application instructions

Applications will be submitted using REDCap. A link will be sent to all CHS Administrators and Public Health Directors through the CHS/PHN email list. Tribal health directors will receive this link through communication from the Office of American Indian Health.

General project information

1. List the community health board or tribe that will be the fiscal host for this application.
2. List the person who will be leading/coordinating the project and their contact information.
3. How much staff time will be dedicated to this project? Tell us the number of staff and the estimated total FTE that will be involved.
4. Checkbox to acknowledge the project requirements and expectations outlined above.
5. Conflict of Interest acknowledgement.

Indicate which foundational areas or capabilities this application will be addressing. You may check more than one.

Foundational Capabilities: Assessment and Surveillance, Community Partnership Development, Equity, Organizational Competencies, Policy Development & Support, Accountability and Performance Management, Emergency Preparedness & Response, Communications.

Foundational Areas: Communicable Disease Control, Chronic Disease & Injury Prevention, Environmental Public Health, Maternal, Child & Family Health, Access to & Linkage with Clinical Care.

Project description

1. Describe your project. What new delivery model(s) or process(es) are you testing and how does this align with the [purpose of the funds](#)? (up to 500 words)
2. Describe what led you to this project and why it is important to the project partners. (up to 500 words)
3. Describe the benefits partnering jurisdictions will gain (e.g., knowledge, skills, resources, abilities, etc.) as a result of this project. (up to 500 words)
4. Describe how this project will support transforming Minnesota's public health system into one that is seamless, responsive, and publicly supported. (up to 500 words)
5. Who is on the project team? Identify the individual names, roles, and responsibilities of up to eight people.
6. With each jurisdiction and/or partner identified, describe what you have done, or are currently doing, to set a strong foundation for successful collaboration on this project. (up to 500 words)
7. Describe how public health leadership from all involved jurisdictions will actively support this project. (up to 500 words)
8. Check-box for Continuation/New Project

If a Continuation Project:

1. If seeking continuing funding, describe your key accomplishments from the first two years of funding and what you have learned so far about transforming the ways in which foundational public health responsibilities are organized, funded, and/or delivered in Minnesota. (up to 500 words)
2. If seeking continuing funding, describe how this project, and Minnesota's public health system more broadly, would benefit from an additional two years of funding for your project. What would additional time and resources allow the project team to do, and why is it important? (up to 500 words)

Budget

Applicants will be asked to enter into REDCap estimated budgets and budget narratives for each grant year.

Definitions

Jurisdiction: For the purpose of this grant application, a Community Health Board or Tribal Nation.

Minnesota's public health system: The governmental public health system of the Minnesota Department of Health, local public health departments, and tribal public health departments.

Six Conditions of Systems Change: “Six interdependent conditions that typically play significant roles in holding a social or environmental problem in place,” as defined in the FSG report [The Water of Systems Change](#).

Grant provisions

Contracting and bidding requirements

Municipalities A grantee that is a municipality, defined as a county, town, city, school district or other municipal corporation or political subdivision of the state authorized by law to enter into contracts is subject to the contracting requirements set forth under [Minn. Stat. § 471.345](#). Projects that involve construction work are subject to the applicable prevailing wage laws, including those under [Minn. Stat. § 177.41](#), et. seq.

Conflicts of interest

MDH will take steps to prevent individual and organizational conflicts of interest, both in reference to applicants and reviewers per [Minn. Stat. § 16B.98](#) and the Office of Grants Management’s Policy 08-01, “Conflict of Interest Policy for State Grant-Making.”

Applicants must complete the Conflict of Interest Acknowledgement in the REDCap Application.

Organizational conflicts of interest occur when:

- A grantee or applicant is unable or potentially unable to render impartial assistance or advice
- A grantee’s or applicant’s objectivity in performing the grant work is or might be otherwise impaired
- A grantee or applicant has an unfair competitive advantage

Individual conflicts of interest occur when:

- An applicant, or any of its employees, uses their position to obtain special advantage, benefit, or access to MDH’s time, services, facilities, equipment, supplies, prestige, or influence
- An applicant, or any of its employees, receives or accepts money, or anything else of value, from another state grantee or grant applicant with respect to the specific project covered by this RFP/project.
- An applicant, or any of its employees, has equity or a financial interest in, or partial or whole ownership of, a competing grant applicant organization.
- An applicant, or any of its employees, is an employee of MDH or is a relative of an employee of MDH.

In cases where a conflict of interest is perceived, disclosed, or discovered, the applicants or grantees will be notified and actions may be pursued, including but not limited to disqualification from eligibility for the grant award or termination of the grant agreement.

Public data and trade secret materials

All applications submitted in response to this RFA will become property of the State. In accordance with [Minn. Stat. § 13.599](#), all applications and their contents are private or nonpublic until the applications are opened.

Once the applications are opened, the name and address of each applicant and the amount requested is public. All other data in an application is private or nonpublic data until completion of the evaluation process, which is defined by statute as when MDH has completed negotiating the grant agreement with the selected applicant.

After MDH has completed the evaluation process, all remaining data in the applications is public with the exception of trade secret data as defined and classified in [Minn. Stat. § 13.37](#), subd. 1(b). A statement by an applicant that the application is copyrighted or otherwise protected does not prevent public access to the application or its contents. ([Minn. Stat. § 13.599](#), subd. 3(a)).

If an applicant submits any information in an application that it believes to be trade secret information, as defined by [Minn. Stat. § 13.37](#), the applicant must:

- Clearly mark all trade secret materials in its application at the time it is submitted,
- Include a statement attached to its application justifying the trade secret designation for each item, and
- Defend any action seeking release of the materials it believes to be trade secret, and indemnify and hold harmless MDH and the State of Minnesota, its agents and employees, from any judgments or damages awarded against the State in favor of the party requesting the materials, and any and all costs connected with that defense.
- This indemnification survives MDH's award of a grant agreement. In submitting an application in response to this RFA, the applicant agrees that this indemnification survives as long as the trade secret materials are in possession of MDH. The State will not consider the prices submitted by the responder to be proprietary or trade secret materials.

MDH reserves the right to reject a claim that any particular information in an application is trade secret information if it determines the applicant has not met the burden of establishing that the information constitutes a trade secret. MDH will not consider the budgets submitted by applicants to be proprietary or trade secret materials. Use of generic trade secret language encompassing substantial portions of the application or simple assertions of trade secret without substantial explanation of the basis for that designation will be insufficient to warrant a trade secret designation.

If a grant is awarded to an applicant, MDH may use or disclose the trade secret data to the extent provided by law. Any decision by the State to disclose information determined to be

trade secret information will be made consistent with the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act ([Ch. 13 MN Statutes](#)) and other relevant laws and regulations.

If certain information is found to constitute trade secret information, the remainder of the application will become public; in the event a data request is received for application information, only the trade secret data will be removed and remain nonpublic.

Audits

Per [Minn. Stat. § 16B.98](#), subd. 8, the grantee's books, records, documents, and accounting procedures and practices of the grantee or other party that are relevant to the grant or transaction are subject to examination by the granting agency and either the legislative auditor or the state auditor, as appropriate. This requirement will last for a minimum of six years from the grant agreement end date, receipt, and approval of all final reports, or the required period of time to satisfy all state and program retention requirements, whichever is later.

Affirmative action and non-discrimination requirements

The grantee agrees not to discriminate against any employee or applicant for employment because of race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, marital status, status in regard to public assistance, membership or activity in a local commission, disability, sexual orientation, or age in regard to any position for which the employee or applicant for employment is qualified. [Minn. Stat. § 363A.02](#). The grantee agrees to take affirmative steps to employ, advance in employment, upgrade, train, and recruit minority persons, women, and persons with disabilities.

The grantee must not discriminate against any employee or applicant for employment because of physical or mental disability in regard to any position for which the employee or applicant for employment is qualified. The grantee agrees to take affirmative action to employ, advance in employment, and otherwise treat qualified disabled persons without discrimination based upon their physical or mental disability in all employment practices such as the following: employment, upgrading, demotion or transfer, recruitment, advertising, layoff or termination, rates of pay or other forms of compensation, and selection for training, including apprenticeship. Minn. Rules, part [5000.3550](#).

The grantee agrees to comply with the rules and relevant orders of the Minnesota Department of Human Rights issued pursuant to the Minnesota Human Rights Act.

Non-transferability

Grant funds are not transferrable to any other entity. Applicants that are aware of any upcoming mergers, acquisitions, or any other changes in their organization or legal standing, must disclose this information to MDH in their application, or as soon as they are aware of it.

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To obtain this information in a different format, call: 651-210-3880.