

# CALL FOR APPLICATIONS: Community-Led Seed Grants

**Applications Due: Monday, Aug. 3, 2026, by 5:00 p.m. CT**

**Supporting community-driven efforts to design new strategies, test innovative ideas, and foster greater collaboration to build a foundation for future efforts to address Wisconsin's leading health challenges**



**AW** ADVANCING A HEALTHIER  
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# Overview

## Advancing a Healthier Wisconsin Endowment Overview

At the Advancing a Healthier Wisconsin Endowment (AHW), we are driven by a vision for a healthier Wisconsin.

As Wisconsin's largest health philanthropy, AHW seeks to propel the most promising work and ideas to improve health and advance health equity in Wisconsin today, and for generations to come. From urban centers to rural and agricultural communities and self-governed tribal nations, we are committed to maximizing the health of ALL Wisconsinites. We do that by providing funding and resources to researchers, organizations, and communities devoted to the health and well-being of the people they serve.

We accelerate innovation, collaboration, and impact by fueling research- and community-identified opportunities. Learn more about [our story](#) and AHW's [areas of focus](#).

## Funding Summary

AHW's Call for Applications: Community-Led Seed Grants supports community-driven efforts to design new strategies, test innovative ideas, and foster greater collaboration to build a foundation for future endeavors to address Wisconsin's leading health challenges and produce deeper impact on health and health equity in Wisconsin's communities. Eligible community-based organizations may request up to \$50,000 for projects completed within a 12-month period, beginning Jan. 1, 2027.

To foster a collaborative approach to award selection, applicants will participate in a peer review process to assess proposals submitted to this funding opportunity by their fellow applicants. For the submitted application to be considered for funding, completion of all assigned reviews is required.

## Application and Review Process Timeline

### June-Aug., 2026

Consult with AHW to review proposed project scope and fit with the call for applications

### By July 20, 2026

Draft application for AHW feedback via draft review form

### Aug. 3, 2026 (required)

Applications due by 5:00 p.m. CT via online application form

### Within three business days of signature request (required)

Electronic signatures due from key personnel via an AHW-initiated DocuSign process

### Aug. 24-Sept. 16, 2026 (required)

Review process conducted via online review platform

### Oct. 2026

Notification of funding decisions

### Jan. 1, 2027

Project start date

## Application Component Checklist

Please see pages 6-9 below for more details on the following required application components:

- ✓ Online form
- ✓ Narrative (PDF attachment to online form)
- ✓ Budget workbook (Excel attachment to online form using AHW-provided Excel template)
- ✓ Budget justification (PDF attachment to online form using AHW-provided Word template)
- ✓ Non-supplanting attestations (PDF attachments to online form using AHW-provided Word template)
- ✓ IRS Verification Letter (PDF attachment to online form; required for nonprofit organizations serving as the primary community partner organization on the application)
- ✓ Signatures (collected via DocuSign after the application is submitted)

## Funding Details

### Description

AHW's Community-Led Seed Grants funding opportunity supports community-driven efforts to conduct initial exploration and test innovative ideas to serve as a foundation for future larger, sustainable efforts to improve health. Eligible community organizations and their community-based collaborators can request up to \$50,000 for projects to be completed during a 12-month period, beginning Jan. 1, 2027. Eligible proposals may be focused on a variety of activities, such as but not limited to:

- Designing and testing innovative community-based health improvement approaches and interventions
- Developing new partnerships or expanding existing partnerships to broaden reach or increase impact
- Gathering and analyzing data to explore novel approaches and interventions
- Taking existing projects to the next level by adding innovative new components

Community-Led Seed Grant proposals should align with AHW's community-based areas of focus—public and community health or health workforce education and development.

- The ***Public and Community Health*** area of focus supports implementation and evaluation of health improvement interventions to address community-based health needs, inform policy and practice, improve health outcomes, and reduce disparities in the long-term. Successful applicants will deepen understanding of the drivers of the public's health in Wisconsin and affect measurable improvement in targeted health indicators.
- The ***Health Workforce Education and Development*** area of focus supports development, implementation, and evaluation of programs and resources to better recruit, retain, and advance community-based health workforces that are responsive to Wisconsin's health needs. Successful applicants will implement strategies to nurture a multifaceted health workforce, including peer support specialists, community health workers, school nurses, public health professionals, and others whose day-to-day work aims to positively improve the health of their communities.

Applicants will clearly identify a health need, an immediate gap in knowledge or practice, cited science-based evidence of the health need among the target population, and proposed project methods to test a novel approach to address the gap and inform future efforts to impact the health need. Successful proposals will position the applicant team to build on promising efforts and demonstrate the potential to lead to improved health and well-being for Wisconsin residents. At the conclusion of the AHW award, projects will be poised to continue, scale, or replicate successful practices and take their efforts to the next level through leveraged

funding, partner commitment, systems changes, and other sustainability strategies for long-term impact on health and health equity.

### Additional Proposal Considerations

- All applications must clearly demonstrate how the proposed project will positively affect health and/or health equity in Wisconsin in the long-term.
- All applications must be submitted by an eligible Wisconsin-based community organization who will be paired with an MCW academic partner upon funding to collaboratively carry out the proposed project.
- Project aims must be distinct from prior or existing funded projects.
- AHW funding is project-specific and not for general organizational support or continuation of existing efforts without a clear effort to innovate on past efforts.
- AHW funds operate through a cost-reimbursement model.
- It is not the intent of AHW funds to be used as bridge funding.
- All proposals must comply with all applicable federal, state, and local laws.

### Applicant Eligibility

At AHW, we believe that we can go further together than we can alone. AHW is committed to supporting collaborative efforts that bring together teams with the necessary expertise, experience, and influence to address Wisconsin's leading health challenges and who together can advance health and health equity for all Wisconsin residents. All applications must be submitted by an eligible Wisconsin-based community organization and all funded projects will be conducted by collaborative teams of community and MCW academic partners committed to carrying out the proposed project together. Upon funding and based on the community-led application submitted by the eligible community organization, AHW will support a collaborative matchmaking process to identify an MCW academic partner from an approved faculty pool to join the community-led project and serve in the identified academic partner role to support the project to achieve its overall goal and advance health. Please see the Funded Project Terms and Conditions for Community-Led Seed Grants on the [AHW website](#) for more details.

### Primary Community Partner Organization

All projects must designate one primary community partner organization to serve as the fiscal agent for the project and one individual from that organization to serve as the primary contact for the project.

The primary community partner organization is responsible for the fiduciary and reporting requirements of the community portion of the project and project budget and is responsible for transferring all communications, notifications, and instructions from AHW to all members of the project team. Eligible community organizations must be a Wisconsin-based 501(c)3 or 501(c)6 organization, or a Wisconsin-based government entity or organization.

### Collaborators

Collaborators are optional but encouraged and are not subject to the same eligibility requirements as the primary community partner organization. Collaborators may include additional partner organizations and contacts. Collaborators typically have a smaller role in the project than the primary community partner and may or may not receive salary support through AHW funding. Any MCW faculty or staff listed as collaborators cannot be included in the community partner budget request. Any individual and/or organization listed as a collaborator should be committed to the proposed project and ready to engage in the project based on their specified role, if funded.

## Budget Requirements

AHW's investment in this funding opportunity for community-led proposals will total approximately \$1 million to support meritorious projects. The exact number of awards will depend on the merit of proposals received. Successful projects will demonstrate an appropriate budget and timeframe for their proposed scope of work. Applicants will be required to provide a detailed budget with justification for all personnel and project expenses. Budget requests on community-led applications from community organizations are limited to \$50,000 maximum and project durations are limited to 12 months maximum. If approved for funding, funds for the MCW academic partner will be separate from and in addition to the community partner budget.

- Project personnel salaries supported by AHW awards are subject to the applicable [NIH salary cap](#) at the project start date.
- At least one representative of the community partner is required to contribute effort to the project for the full award period.
- Award personnel may cost-share their effort with support from their entity. Cost-sharing may support any or all salary put forth. AHW funds may not be used to cost-share effort on any other work.
- All personnel support must be justified, and specific project roles outlined in the budget justification. AHW funds cannot support general operational activities or replace funding already available for a position.

For information on financial compliance and reporting requirements for funded projects, please review the Funded Project Terms and Conditions for Community-Led Seed Grants on the [AHW website](#). By applying for an AHW award, applicants agree to these terms and conditions.

## Supplanting Criteria

AHW was established as the result of a generous financial gift made by Blue Cross & Blue Shield United of Wisconsin to the people of Wisconsin, giving AHW the extraordinary responsibility to steward this financial gift on behalf of Wisconsin residents. As such, AHW adheres to requirements as defined in a March 28, 2000, Order of the Commissioner of Insurance, which requires that AHW funds (the Funds) "may not be used to supplant funds or resources otherwise available." AHW, via MCW, must report annually on its determination that the Funds do not supplant other resources that may be available to accomplish the same purposes. A [supplanting guide](#) can be found on the AHW website.

Prior to final funding recommendations and approval, AHW and/or its oversight body, the MCW Consortium on Public and Community Health (Consortium), will assess whether other financial resources exist or are available for the project. Applicants must certify that no financial resources will be supplanted and provide a complete listing of current funding sources for the project or similar other projects.

## Allowable Expenses and Funding Restrictions

AHW uses a cost-reimbursement model. Funds can only be used for direct project-specific expenses, including salary and benefits for personnel directly involved in the project and direct expenses such as supplies, travel, etc.

Funds may not be used for:

- Projects conducted outside of Wisconsin
- Indirect costs such as ongoing operating expenses for routine functions, F&A and principal programs
- Debt reduction
- Entertainment or alcoholic beverages
- Lobbying
- Reimbursement solely for patient care or clinical service delivery

- Publishing fees to benefit education or research in general
- Implementation expenses of educational programs, such as teaching and advising expenses once educational programs begin to matriculate students
- Stipends and flat fees/rates
- Supplanting

View a complete list of [Allowable and Unallowable Costs](#) on the AHW website.

## Application and Review Process

AHW's Community-Led Seed Grants funding opportunity uses a one-stage application and multi-stage review process.

### Application Process

Eligible community organizations should submit an application via the online application form available on the [AHW website](#). Applications must be submitted via the online form by **5:00 p.m. CT on Monday, Aug. 3, 2026**. Late applications will not be accepted.

Please use the following instructions to prepare the application for final submission via the online form by the deadline. Applicants must answer all required fields and follow the restrictions set within the online form. No paper or emailed applications will be considered, and no attachments beyond those specifically requested in the following instructions will be accepted.

When filling out the online form, you may save your progress and resume at a later time by checking "Save my progress and resume later" in the upper right-hand corner of the form. Please note that attachments will not save in the form and should be added at time of submission. If saving, please follow the system prompts to save and re-access the form. Only one applicant team member may begin and save the online form by creating a login (email address and password) that will allow that individual to return to saved work. We recommend you designate one individual to enter the completed application information online.

The application includes the following sections:

#### 1. Online Form

The application form provides general project information and must be completed via the online form accessible on the [AHW website](#). The online form includes:

- Project title and goal statement
- Requested award amount and project duration
- Primary community partner contact information
- Optional collaborator information
- AHW alignment information and geographic area impacted by the proposed project
- Key project roles needed from the MCW academic partner
- Implementation plan listing the proposed project-specific aims and objectives
- Project team member serving as the peer reviewer

#### 2. Narrative (attachment)

The narrative is the applicant's opportunity to describe their project in detail. Project narratives must be uploaded as a PDF attachment in the indicated location within the online form. Responses to all sections of the narrative are required, and the narrative is limited to a maximum of four (4) pages, not including citations, using 0.5" margins and 11-point font, single-spaced.

Organize the narrative in the order specified below. Start each section with the appropriate section heading (bolded below), address each sub-point in your narrative response for that section, and use lay-friendly language as much as possible. We encourage applicants to be clear and concise, and insert graphics, tables, and charts when applicable and within the allowable page limit.

- **Project Background**
  - Describe the health need to be addressed, why it is a priority for the target Wisconsin-based population, and the current gap that the project aims to address, including cited science-based evidence of the health need for the target population.
  - State the intended long-term impact on Wisconsin's health as a result of the project.
- **Project Aims and Approach**
  - Describe in detail the key activities and processes to accomplish the project aims in alignment with and to share more details on the aims and objectives included in the implementation plan section within the online form.
  - Discuss key next steps to build on the Seed Grant efforts that may occur after the project period ends, including future potential projects, sustainability plans, dissemination efforts, and leveraging opportunities.
- **Project Recruitment and Evaluation Strategies**
  - Outline the recruitment strategies for any project or study participants (i.e., survey respondents, focus group participants, pilot site enrollment, etc.), if applicable. Study recruitment does not include recruitment of any project staff or team members.
  - Explain the evaluation strategies and key metrics to assess the project outcomes and demonstrate success to inform future efforts.
- **Project Team**
  - State the roles and responsibilities of each community-based project team member and organization.
  - Briefly describe the experience or expertise for each project team member that makes them best suited to carry out their role on the proposed project.
  - Describe how the project team will ensure a successful collaboration and how the applicants anticipate the partnership evolving during the project and beyond.
- **Citations** (not included in the page limit)
  - Include all references cited in the narrative.
  - Each reference should include the names of all authors, the article and journal title, book title, volume number, page numbers, and year of publication.  
Applicants should be especially careful to follow scholarly practices in providing citations for source materials used in the preparation of the application.

3. **Budget Workbook** (attachment using the AHW-provided Excel form accessible on the funding opportunities page on the [AHW website](#))  
Applicants must complete the Community Partner Budget table (tab 2) following the guidelines detailed in the Budget Instructions (tab 1) in the budget workbook (Excel). The total budget amount on the Community Project Budget table must equal the amount requested for the project on the online form. If the amounts do not match upon submission, AHW will use the total project budget amount in the budget workbook as the final request amount, as long as it does not exceed the \$50,000 maximum request.

When developing the budget, please refer to the detailed Budget Instructions (tab 1), the complete list of [Allowable and Unallowable Costs](#) on the AHW website, and the Budget Requirements section above.

4. **Budget Justification** (attachment using the AHW-provided Word form accessible on the funding opportunities page on the [AHW website](#))  
Applicants must complete the Community Partner Budget Justification (Word) and must include descriptions of all funded positions and all direct expense line items included in the budget workbook.

Applicants should follow the guidelines and descriptions provided in the Budget Instructions (tab 1) in the budget workbook.

5. **Non-Supplanting Attestations** (attachment using the AHW-provided Word form accessible on the funding opportunities page on the [AHW website](#))  
Non-supplanting attestations are used to identify existing or available funding for the proposed project and to determine whether such existing or available funding would be replaced with financial support by AHW funds. A separate non-supplanting attestation form must be completed by all key project partners, including:

- Primary community partner organization
- Any additional project partners labeled as investigators within the application

6. **IRS Nonprofit Verification Letter** (attachment to online form)  
If the primary community partner organization on the application is a 501(c)3 or 501(c)6 organization, the IRS Nonprofit Verification Letter indicating the organization's status as a 501(c)3 or 501(c)6 organization must be submitted. The IRS Verification Letter notifies a nonprofit organization that its application for federal tax exemption under Section 501(c)3 or 501(c)6 has been approved. Only the IRS Nonprofit Verification Letter will be accepted and please do not submit tax documentation in place of the IRS Nonprofit Verification Letter.

IRS Nonprofit Verification Letters are not required for Wisconsin-based government entities serving as the primary community partner organization on the application or any other collaborating partners beyond a nonprofit primary community partner organization.

7. **Signatures**

Following successful submission of the completed application through the online form and technical review, signatures will be required via an AHW-initiated DocuSign process from the following individuals to indicate their awareness and support of the submitted application:

- Primary community partner organization contact and an individual authorized signer, if applicable
- Any additional project partners labeled as investigators within the application and completing a non-supplanting attestation

**Following submission and technical review, each of the individuals above will receive an email with instructions to complete and submit their electronic signature. Required signatures must be submitted within three business days of receiving the signature request** to complete the submission and advance it for review. AHW will send DocuSign requests as soon as possible, but please note that it may not be sent immediately. Any delays in AHW initiating the DocuSign process will be accommodated for when considering signature deadlines.

## Review Process

### *Technical Review*

Submitted applications will undergo technical review by AHW staff to ensure that all requirements are met, including but not limited to eligibility criteria and adherence to the guidelines and restrictions. AHW will follow up with all applicants as part of the technical review process. Applicant teams should be prepared to respond quickly to communications from AHW following the application deadline.

### *Peer Review*

Peer reviews will be conducted for applications that pass technical review by a review body consisting of other applicants who applied to this funding opportunity. Each applicant team will identify one project team member in their application to serve as a peer reviewer. The peer reviewer must complete all assigned peer reviews for the submitted application to be eligible for funding consideration.

### *Programmatic Review*

Applications that pass technical review will be reviewed for alignment with the call for applications and AHW funding requirements to ensure that funded projects are set up for successful efforts.

### *Consortium Review*

The MCW Consortium on Public and Community Health (Consortium) will review the recommendations from the reviewers and approve a slate of proposals to fund. AHW may request that applicants adjust their scope, budget, or timeline based on the outcome of the review process. If necessary, these applicants will be notified and asked to resubmit their adjusted application materials for further review. No negotiations or appeals will be accommodated. Final funding decisions will be advanced to the MCW Board of Trustees for approval.

### *Review Criteria*

All applications will be reviewed using the following criteria:

- Addresses an important health-related issue in the field, explains why it is a priority, and includes cited science-based evidence of the health need for the target population
- Describes innovative approaches and planned evaluation or assessment to directly inform future efforts to advance health and/or health equity in the long-term
- Demonstrates high-quality, appropriate methods that appear likely to achieve the stated aims
- Demonstrates the potential to positively impact health and/or health equity in Wisconsin, either as a direct result of project activities or over the long-term
- Provides convincing evidence that the project could lead to scaled, replicated, or continued efforts in the future
- Is led by a community partner and additional collaborators, as applicable, who appear to bring the necessary experience and expertise to carry out the project
- Describes a scope which appears feasible to complete within the requested project budget and duration
- Appears to be aligned with the intent of the call for applications and the selected AHW area of focus

Reviewers will provide scores and written comments for each proposal. The scoring system uses a nine-point scale based on the rating scale used by the National Institutes of Health. The nine-point rating scale is anchored according to the following descriptions:

1. Exceptional (exceptionally strong with essentially no weaknesses)
2. Outstanding (extremely strong with negligible weaknesses)
3. Excellent (very strong with only some minor weaknesses)
4. Very Good (strong but with numerous minor weaknesses)

5. Good (strong but with at least one moderate weakness)
6. Satisfactory (some strengths but also some moderate weaknesses)
7. Fair (some strengths but with at least one major weakness)
8. Marginal (a few strengths and a few major weaknesses)
9. Poor (very few strengths and numerous major weaknesses)

- Minor Weakness: An easily addressable weakness that does not substantially lessen impact
- Moderate Weakness: A weakness that lessens impact
- Major Weakness: A weakness that severely lessens impact

### Conflict of Interest

Each review process follows a Conflict of Interest policy. A conflict of interest is apparent whenever a reviewer's objectivity may be perceived as compromised by the nature of a personal or professional relationship or obligation to an applicant. Reviewers with a conflict of interest pertaining to a proposal's review and/or funding are self-identified and recused from review of that proposal.

### Award Determination

Following completion of the review process, notification of conditional award determination, pending supplanting review and completion of the award initiation requirements, is anticipated to be shared with the primary community partner organization contact in October 2026.

Following award determination, funded community partner projects will be paired with an MCW academic partner from an approved faculty pool with expertise that aligns with the identified key roles for the MCW partner in the community partner application. Requests for specific academic partners will be considered, but final pairing will be determined based on capacity and overall alignment. Once paired, funded projects will be conducted collaboratively by the community-MCW academic partner team.

### Non-Discrimination

The Medical College of Wisconsin offers all its educational programs and services, including admissions, and all employment opportunities, conditions and benefits, including recruitment, selection, promotion, pay, use of facilities, and retirement, without discrimination, as defined by applicable federal and state laws, executive regulations and orders. MCW is committed to the principle of equal opportunity in education and employment. MCW does not discriminate against individuals on the basis of age, race, creed, religion, color, disability, marital status, sex, national origin, ancestry, sexual orientation, gender identity, arrest record, conviction record, membership in the national guard, state defense force or any other reserve component of the military forces of the United States or the State of Wisconsin, or use or nonuse of lawful products off MCW's premises during nonworking hours in the administration of its educational policies, admissions policies, employment policies, scholarship and loan programs, and other MCW administered programs and activities, but may favor Wisconsin residents in admissions. Research and programs aimed at advancing health equity among specific groups must provide evidence of disparity with the general population. All communications and questions concerning this policy should be directed to the Vice President of Human Resources.

## Application Resources

*Our goal is to support applicants through the application process to the best of our abilities, and we encourage applicants to contact AHW staff with questions throughout the application process.*

## AHW Online Resources

AHW's website provides information, application resources, and answers to frequently asked questions related to each funding opportunity and the AHW funding process. Visit the AHW website at [www.ahwendowment.org](http://www.ahwendowment.org).

A fillable template of the online application form is available for download via the AHW website. The template will not be accepted as a final submission but is designed to be used by the applicant team to prepare their collaborative responses prior to completing and submitting the online form by the application deadline.

## Pre-Application AHW Consultation

For an efficient application process, applicants are encouraged to connect with AHW to discuss their proposed project scope and ensure alignment with the funding opportunity. After reviewing the RFA and associated materials, applicants are encouraged to connect as early in the development of their proposal as possible. Complete the consultation request form on the [AHW website](#) to set up a time to discuss your proposal idea.

## Catchafire Access

AHW has teamed up with [Catchafire](#) to provide support to AHW applicants by matching them with professional, skilled volunteers ready to lend their expertise on general projects related to marketing, IT, finance, design, fundraising, human resources, and more. Within five minutes, you can post a project and get connected to a global network of professionals looking to use their skillsets to directly support causes they care about. You'll also have unlimited access to nonprofit experts, with coaching and professional development opportunities to help you along with the way. Complete the Catchafire request form on the [AHW website](#) to access this resource.



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