

## INVITATION TO APPLY: BUILDING CONNECTIONS INITIATIVE

### What is this opportunity?

The launch of the Building Connections Initiative represents a fundamental shift in Empire Health Foundation's grant-making activities and our commitment to working alongside community partners. We're dedicating our full range of resources — from staff time and expertise, to convening and funding opportunities — to supporting the self-determined visions of our community partners through multi-year grant commitments. This work will prioritize [by-and-for, grassroots organizations](#) representing BIPOC, 2SLGBTQIA+, disability, low-income and rural communities. We will also be prioritizing cohort members for additional funding programs, resources, networking, and development opportunities. Our intent through this initiative is to support an increasingly interconnected ecosystem of nonprofits working towards a more equitable community and vibrant democracy in eastern Washington.

While we believe this focused, cohort-based approach is the most effective way to support our regional partners and advance [health equity](#) in our region, we understand that it comes with trade-offs. Committing most of our funding and attention to this cohort, and to organizations that are by and for [historically marginalized communities](#), necessarily means that we will have less available funding and resources for our broader community of partners. Some organizations and events that we've sponsored and supported in the past likely will not continue to receive funding moving forward. We've heard from community that this focused approach can have the greatest impact for our community, and we believe there's potential for this impact to reverberate across our region. As we focus our support on organizations working for a stronger, more equitable community, we want to acknowledge that we won't be able to provide the same funding or support to all of our current partners.

### Why now?

Over the past four years, we've been listening and learning from community. You've told us that your organizations need stable funding commitments and deeper, more meaningful relationships with EHF. We've embedded these learnings into our [10-year strategic direction](#) which guides this grant program.

### What do we hope to accomplish together in 10 years?

We imagine an Inland Northwest where everyone determines their own paths to healthy, thriving lives, no matter who we are, where we live, or how much money we make. To accomplish this, we believe communities need strong leaders equipped with the experience and resources to lead stable organizations built with the infrastructure and access to resources to sustain change and build power, and an interconnected approach to changing systems to better support these community visions. This will take true partnership, a centering of community leadership at every turn, and organizations like EHF willing to use every resource at our disposal. We are inviting leaders and organizations who share this vision and have the relationships in the key communities identified to join us. If you're energized by the prospect of



creating spaces for organizational and leadership growth towards authentic community determination and [power building](#), this is an opportunity for you.

This invitation represents an initial expression of EHF's commitment to [historically marginalized communities](#). A commitment to prioritize the use of our resources towards this effort, to organize other funders and institutions to increase the resources available for this work, and to follow the lead of our community partners in how we can best provide support. The grant funding here is our initial commitment. We are confident that over the course of the next five years we will be able to bring additional resources to community partners involved and you should hold us accountable to this goal. We know it will take significant resources and effective partnership to bring this vision to life, but we are up to the task and know our communities can't wait.

## Who should apply?

This fund will support [grassroots and by-and-for nonprofit organizations](#) representing and responsive to BIPOC, 2SLGBTQIA+, disability, rural and low-income communities. Organizations must have 501(c)(3) status to apply. Our grants are open to organizations serving Adams, Ferry, Lincoln, Pend Oreille, Spokane, Stevens, and Whitman counties, as well as the lands and people of the Colville Confederated, Kalispel, and Spokane Sovereign Nations.

Our priority will be communities impacted by persistent health inequities. We will ask you to describe how this is true for your community and your vision for a healthier future for your community. Applicants should be excited by the potential of working alongside other nonprofits in a cohort model that will offer opportunities for shared learning, healing experiences, and additional grant funding.

If you have questions regarding eligibility for this project or the scope of engagement expected of cohort members, please contact:

Jeri Rathbun:  
[jeri@empirehealthfoundation.org](mailto:jeri@empirehealthfoundation.org)  
(509) 919-3047

Zeke Smith:  
[zeke@empirehealthfoundation.org](mailto:zeke@empirehealthfoundation.org)  
(503)453-2832

## How will the cohort operate?

The Building Connections Initiative will support organizations in realizing their vision for [health equity](#) in their community. We believe that working together towards the shared goal of health equity can build an interconnected network of nonprofits capable of catalyzing systems change for a more equitable and vibrant community in eastern Washington.

Applicants selected for this cohort will be asked to engage in co-creating this program in collaboration with EHF Staff and fellow nonprofits. While the cadence and shape of these convenings will be decided with the direction of the cohort, we expect regular engagement from grantees. With that engagement we anticipate convening a Collective Action Committee that can advise EHF and steward additional grant opportunities into impacted communities. We also plan to create opportunities for shared healing experiences for our partners and for knowledge sharing based on partner needs. In order to improve this program, there will be periodic check-ins with EHF staff and a yearly storytelling and evaluation session.

## Available resources

EHF is dedicating at least \$5 million over five years to this program, with \$1 million dedicated to annual general operating grants. Grant awards will range up to to \$75,000 per year depending on the size of an organization’s annual operating budget. These funds will be for general operating expenses and may be spent at the grantee organization’s discretion. EHF will create a low-barrier annual reporting process that focuses on mutual learning and organizational storytelling. Grantees selected in 2024 will receive a 5-year commitment covering 2025-2029. The first installment will be paid in February 2025.

Cohort members will also be prioritized for additional EHF grant funding programs. These opportunities will evolve from year to year and funding opportunities may open throughout the year as resources are made available. In 2025, we anticipate additional grant-making for technical assistance, storytelling, and policy and advocacy work.

Annual Funding Range: \$50,000-\$75,000  
Total funds available: \$1 million per year, \$5 million over five years

Type: Yearly Grants and 5-year funding commitment

Eligible: Registered 501 (c)(3) nonprofits

**Application Opens: September 12, 2024**

**Application Closes: November 8, 2024**

Review Period: November 11- December 12, 2024

Notices of Funding: December 13, 2024

Funds Release: February 2025

Application Format: Applications will be available online through SmartSimple

## The application process

We are dedicated to creating a low-barrier application process and will work to accommodate any needs your organization has to ensure all interested organizations are able to submit an application. In our selection process, we will prioritize by-and-for, grassroots organizations representing BIPOC, 2SLGBTQIA+, disability, low-income and rural communities.

Our application process will be focused on how your organization represents and is responsive to historically marginalized communities in your organizational mission, as well as how your staff and board is representative of the community served. We are not seeking information about specific projects or programmatic needs.

The application will be available through SmartSimple, our grant management software system. EHF staff will be available to support applicants and provide additional information during the application process. Virtual and in-person Q&A meetings will also be offered.

## Preview Application Questions

1. Tell us how your organization is by-and-for the community you serve?
2. How do you define the communities your organization represents?
3. How does your board and senior leadership reflect the community/communities your organization serves? Be specific.
4. Does your organization serve rural, urban, and/or Tribal communities?
5. What was your annual operating budget for the last three years of operation? If you do not have three years of operations, provide the operating budget for the years you do. (We are prioritizing organizations with annual budgets between \$200K-\$2M)
6. Is your organization a registered 501(c)(3)?
7. Why do you want to be a part of this community work?
8. Tell us how your organization is working to build power and cultivate health in your community?
9. Do you want to participate with EHF and the cohort and be considered for additional resources if you are not selected for a general operating grant?
10. What is your organizational purpose?
11. What is your 5-year plan/objectives to meet your organizational purpose? If you do not have a 5-year plan, what impact do you aspire to have in your community in the next five years?
12. What are your top organizational priorities for 2025?
13. What are your organizational storytelling needs?\*
14. What are your organizational technical assistance needs?\*
15. What are your organizational policy and advocacy needs?\*
16. Where is your organization in its organizational life cycle? [Learn more here.](#)
17. Tell us about organizations that are partners in your work.
18. Tell us about barriers in your community and to your work.
19. Tell us anything else you think we should understand about your organization and your community.

\*This does not guarantee additional resources, but helps us better understand your organizational needs.

This preview is intended to give prospective applicants adequate insight on what to expect with the grant application. This preview does not encompass the full application or application process. The final application may include additional questions and changes to what is previewed here. We welcome feedback before, during and after the open application period to help us with continual growth towards a more inclusive and accessible process.

## The review process

Applications will be reviewed by a committee of EHF staff and community representatives. We intend to use a community participatory process. The review committee will provide input and guidance to a final decision committee composed of EHF Executive Leadership and EHF Board members.

Applications will be reviewed according to the following criteria:

1. Is this a by-and-for organization? (board and senior leadership represent the community served, the organization can describe other tangible ways that community is involved in governance of the organization, and the organization exists to meet community needs)
2. Is this a community based, grassroots effort from prioritized communities (BIPOC, 2SLGBTQIA+, disability, rural and low-income communities)?
3. Is the organization's operational budget greater than \$200K and less than \$2M?
4. Is the organization a registered 501(c)(3)?
5. Does the organization serve communities in Adams, Ferry, Lincoln, Pend Oreille, Spokane, Stevens, and/or Whitman counties, or the people of the Colville Confederated, Kalispel, and Spokane Sovereign Nations?

We will also evaluate applications to understand the following organizational context:

1. Organization life-cycle ([learn more here](#))
2. 2025 needs
3. 5-year goals
4. Organization purpose
5. Geographic designation of urban, rural, tribal
6. Organization's interest in being involved in the cohort model and engaging in learning with EHF.