



INVITATION TO APPLY: BUILDING CONNECTIONS INITIATIVE

Important note: We acknowledge this is an extensive document and that a reliance on the written word can be a barrier for our community partners. If you have additional questions or prefer alternative means of communication, please contact us at grants@empirehealthfoundation.org.

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 recognize that communities at the intersections of these identities are most persistently impacted by inequities and invite organizations to share how this may be true for their community. We will also prioritize grantee organizations for additional funding programs, resources, networking, and development opportunities. Through this initiative, we intend 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, 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 relationships in the key communities identified to join us in a community of learning. This will be an intersectional space and we will be working from shared agreements that honor and respect the diversity of identities and backgrounds represented in the community. 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 disadvantaged communities](#). A commitment to prioritize 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.

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. 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. We will prioritize organizations that have nonprofit status. We are also open to exploring opportunities for non 501(c)(3) organizations and/or those that have recently filed with the IRS for their federal tax-exempt status. Please reach out to us if this applies to you.

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 and prepared to work in an intersectional space 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 the Building Connections Team at grants@empirehealthfoundation.org.

How will the cohort operate?

The Building Connections Initiative will support organizations in realizing their vision for [health equity](#) in their community. 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.

Cohort members will be expected to participate in shaping and respecting shared agreements. We believe that by working together toward the shared goal of improving health equity we can build an interconnected network of nonprofits capable of catalyzing systems change for a more equitable and vibrant community in eastern Washington.

We also plan to create opportunities for shared healing experiences for our partners and for knowledge sharing based on partner needs. We will not be requiring extensive grant reporting. There will be periodic check-ins with EHF staff and a yearly storytelling and evaluation session to improve the program.

Available resources

EHF is dedicating \$5 million over five years to this program, with \$1 million dedicated to annual general operating grants. Grant awards will be \$50,000 per year. 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 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 based on third-party funding opportunities. In 2025, we anticipate additional grant making for technical assistance, healing, storytelling, and policy and advocacy work.

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

Type: Yearly Grants and 5-year funding
commitment

Eligible: We will prioritize registered 501
(c)(3) nonprofits

Application Opens: September 25, 2024
Application Closes: November 15, 2024
**Award Announcements: January 7-10,
2025**

Application Format: Applications will be
available online through SmartSimple.

Staff will be available to provide
accommodations upon request.

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. We are open to alternatives to a written grant application and ask that you contact grants@empirehealthfoundation.org to discuss alternative application formats.

The application process will include two parts, an eligibility screening phase and an application phase for organizations that meet the eligibility screening criteria. Applicants who have recently completed an EHF technical assistance application will not be required to resubmit information in the eligibility screening



phase. The eligibility screening will be conducted through our SmartSimple software platform. Our intention in creating this eligibility phase is to reduce unnecessary effort for community partners who do not fit the eligibility criteria for this program

In the eligibility phase, we will only be advancing organizations that meet the following criteria:

1. Is the organization located within or serving community members in EHF's seven county, three Tribal Nation service area?
2. Is the organization grassroots, by-and-for led?
3. Does the organization's executive leadership and board represent the people they serve?
4. Is the organization working with traditionally excluded communities?
5. Is the organization prepared and willing to engage in intersectional spaces? ([link to resources](#))

Following review of an organization's submitted eligibility application, the organization will be notified of their eligibility status. All applicants will receive notice of whether they are deemed eligible or not within three business days. This notice will be sent through grants@empirehealthfoundation.org. We encourage applicants to add this email to their contact list to avoid messages being sent to spam folders. If you do not receive a timely notice, please reach out to grants@empirehealthfoundation.org.

Organizations deemed eligible will receive an invitation to complete the full application.

We invite and encourage you to reach out for assistance with the application process. Please contact the Building Connections Team at grants@empirehealthfoundation.org to set up a conversation with us.

Preview Application Questions

Many of these questions will be check boxes. We intend to limit short answer questions as much as possible and are open to working with your organization if you would prefer to submit written questions in alternative formats (i.e. video or in conversation with staff).

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.

Eligibility phase Questions:

1. Is your organization a registered 501(c)(3)?
2. What is your organizational purpose?
3. What was your 2024 annual operating budget?
4. Where is your organization in its organizational life cycle? [Learn more here.](#)
5. Does your organization serve rural, urban, and/or Tribal communities?
6. How do you define the communities your organization represents?
7. Tell us how your organization is by-and-for the community you serve?
8. How does your board and senior leadership reflect the community/communities your organization serves? Please be specific.
9. Is your organization prepared and willing to engage in intersectional spaces? [Learn more here.](#)

10. 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?

Application phase questions:

1. 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?
2. As a developing organization, what are the current resources you are prioritizing?
3. Tell us about your organization's experience and/or interest engaging in intersectional spaces? [Learn more here.](#)
4. Tell us about organizations that are partners in your work.
5. Tell us about barriers in your community and to your work.
6. Tell us how your organization is working to build power and cultivate health in your community?
7. Tell us what interests your organization about being a part of the Building Connections community of partners?
8. Tell us anything else you think we should understand about your organization and your community.

We want to learn more about your organization through the application process. EHF staff will reach out to applicants who pass the eligibility phase to set up individual conversations.

The review process

Applications will be reviewed by a committee of EHF staff. 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 this organization prepared and willing to function in an intersectional space?
4. 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. Organizational life-cycle ([learn more here](#))
2. Annual operating budget
3. Organizational priorities
4. 5-year goals
5. Organizational purpose
6. Geographic designation of urban, rural, tribal
7. Organization's interest in being involved in the cohort model and engaging in learning with EHF