

FUNDING
OPPORTUNITY
ANNOUNCEMENT

Strengthening for impact

Capacity support
for nonprofit resilience
and growth

OPPORTUNITY OVERVIEW

Health Forward is pleased to announce a funding opportunity to support organization strengthening and capacity resilience for small nonprofits and their leaders. For nonprofits led by leaders of color and/or based in rural communities, this opportunity focuses on strengthening an organization's ability to navigate change, sustain its work, and deepen its impact in the communities it serves.

A report by the Aspen Institute showed that less than 7 percent of foundation giving reaches rural communities compared to serving about 20 percent of the U.S. population.

A 2025 report from The Center for Effective Philanthropy's highlighted that nonprofits in rural areas are disproportionately affected by staffing shortages, political volatility, and funding uncertainty. Many rural nonprofits report difficulty maintaining operations due to limited access to competitive compensation and federal support.

A 2022 survey from Nonprofit Finance Fund showed that compared to Black, Indigenous, and Latino nonprofits, white-led nonprofits received more unrestricted funds (15 percent more), more federal funding (14 percent more), and more corporate funding (13 percent more). Less than 7 percent of all philanthropic dollars go to organizations led by people of color, despite serving approximately 42 percent of the U.S. population.

According to the Building Movement Project's Race to Lead report, leaders of color, on average, have smaller budgets to work with and are more likely than their white counterparts to report lack of access to financial support from a variety of funding sources. Rural nonprofits are also underfunded and often lack the capacity to work.

All of this informs the work of Health Forward's purpose plan and strategies in our Power purpose area. It's the reason we seek to redistribute and share power with the people we serve by advancing participation in democracy, amplifying community-driven movements, and strengthening small, community-based organizations and leaders. We recognize the vital role small organizations led by leaders of color and rural-based nonprofits play in advancing equity, justice, and community well-being, often with limited resources and infrastructure.

This funding opportunity aims to:

- Strengthen essential operational capacity (e.g., financial management, human resources, technology)
- Support leadership development and staff well-being
- Enhance long-term sustainability through strategic planning and fund development
- Support resilience and adaptiveness to meet changing community needs and external challenges

Health Forward will support capacity strengthening for eligible community-based nonprofit organizations that contribute to Health Forward's purpose to build and support inclusive, powerful, and healthy communities characterized by racial equity and economically just systems and whose organizational work includes efforts to advance the strategies in Health Forward's purpose plan.

KEY INFORMATION

Purpose Area

Power

Strategy

Advance capacity building, leadership development, and connectedness

Outcomes we seek

- Stronger and more effective community-based organizations and leaders.
- Increased organizational strength, fiscal capacity, and effectiveness of essential small and grassroots organizations.
- Stronger networks and greater connectedness among community leaders.

Deadlines

- October 15, 2025: Basic application due by noon
- November 2025: Applications reviewed
- January 2026: Funding awards announced

Funding Term

Awards will be 12 or 24 months

Award amount

Most gifts awarded through this opportunity will be \$100,000 annually or \$200,000, distributed over a two-year period.

Funding to our community partners are primarily via gifts rather than grants. In some cases, awards may be restricted in purpose or budget. Each application will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

Connect with us before you apply!

Would you like to connect with us?

[Request a consultation](#) on our website. We are available to discuss your work — and encourage you to do so — before you submit your basic application. We especially encourage organizations who are new to Health Forward to seek a consultation prior to application submission.

WHAT WE MEAN WHEN WE SAY CAPACITY STRENGTHENING AND CAPACITY RESILIENCE

As Health Forward continues to learn how to best support small, community-based nonprofits, we are shifting our language from capacity building to capacity strengthening and capacity resilience. This change is intentional and grounded in equity, clarity, and respect.

Health Forward defines capacity strengthening as the process of developing and strengthening the skills, resources, systems, and structures that nonprofits need to effectively achieve their missions.

We define capacity resilience as the process and activities developed to sustain, adapt, and recover from internal and external challenges — including crises and long-term stress — while continuing to fulfill a nonprofit’s mission.

Health Forward views supporting capacity strengthening and resilience as a priority for community-based organizations serving those who experience the greatest injustice in health outcomes, including:

- People of color whose health outcomes are shaped by structural racism and other socioeconomic conditions.
- People in rural areas where systemic barriers hinder optimal health.

CAPACITY STRENGTHENING

Strengthening skills, systems, and structures to improve long-term effectiveness

Examples of activities



Staff training



Executive and board development



Strategic planning



Upgrading technology

CAPACITY RESILIENCE

Enhancing an organization’s ability to adapt, recover, and sustain impact during disruption

Examples of activities



Crisis planning



Cross-training staff



Flexible funding strategies



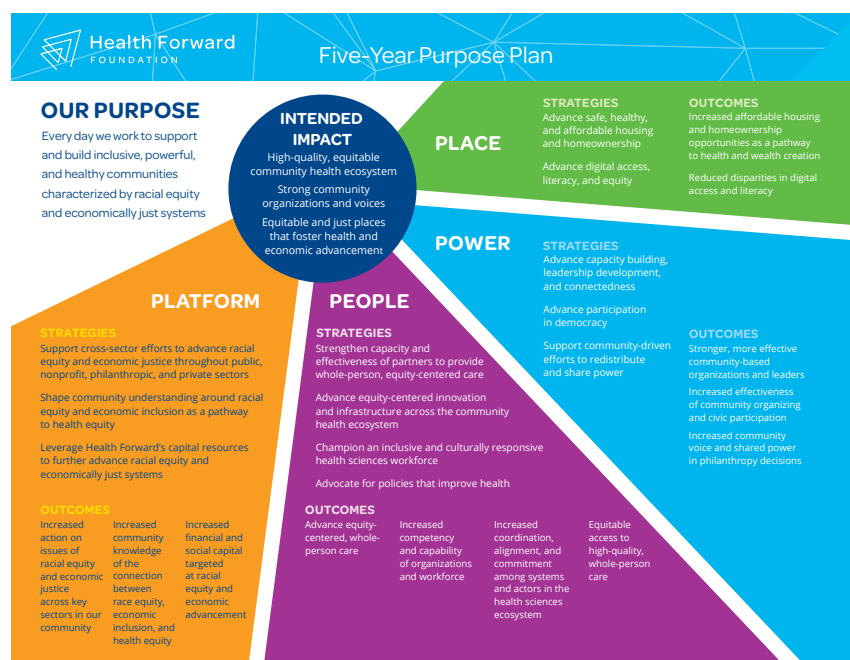
Wellness strategies

WHY THIS APPROACH TO STRENGTHENING CAPACITY?

Community-based and grassroots groups, organizations, and leaders play a vital role in advancing equitable policies, practices, and resources focused on health equity. These organizations positively impact their communities despite systemic barriers to equitable resources. We trust and prioritize the expertise and personal experience of community-based organizations in identifying their own capacity needs.

Funding Priorities

Health Forward will prioritize organizations whose primary work supports one or more of the [Health Forward purpose areas](#) — Power, Place, Platform, and People.



Health Forward will fund capacity strengthening efforts as defined by the applicant, informed by the organization's self-assessed strengths and desired areas for growth.

To better understand your organization's strengths and areas for potential additional support, we have provided links below to access free self-assessment organizational tools.

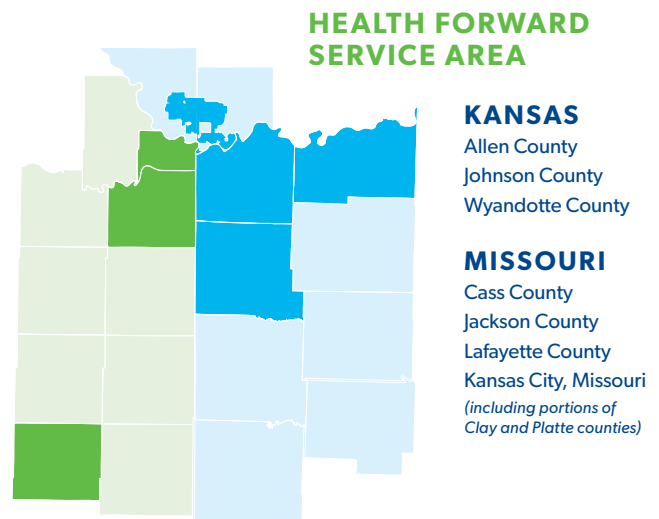
The first button is for the Organizational Mapping Tool from the Ford Foundation. The second resource is The Nonprofit Capacity Instrument, a free confidential assessment backed by science. The Network for Nonprofit and Social Impact offers both a paper and online version of the tool.

Organizational
Mapping Tool

NNSI Nonprofit
Capacity Instrument

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

To be eligible for this opportunity, the applicant must work in the [Health Forward service area](#). Health Forward will not fund organizations, projects or advocacy focused on electing or opposing specific candidates for elected office. Other [eligibility criteria](#) is available on our website. We encourage you to review it.



Eligible organizations are:

- Currently 501(c)3 tax status or in the process of applying for 501(c)3 status
- Black-, Indigenous-, or Latino-serving organizations — defined as organizations that are led by a president/CEO who identifies as Black, Indigenous, or Latino OR organizations that have a board of directors with at least 51 percent of members identifying as Black, Indigenous, or Latino. The population served must also be at least 51 percent Black, Indigenous, or Latino
- Rural-located and rural population-focused organizations
- Aligned with the work of Health Forward's purpose areas — Power, Place, Platform, or People

- Located in Health Forward's service area — Wyandotte, Johnson, and Allen counties in Kansas and Cass, Jackson, and Lafayette counties in Missouri, as well as all of Kansas City, Missouri, including portions of Clay and Platte counties
- Have an annual operating budget between \$50,000 – \$2 million

** Annual operating budget will be defined by an organization most recent IRS Form 990 or an organization most recent profit and loss statement*

Health Forward seeks to partner with nonprofits who are:



- **Sharing power with community**
The extent community members formally/ informally influence and shape the direction of the work



- **Impact and learning-focused**
The practice of analyzing outcomes and adjusting accordingly, incorporating new ideas

HOW TO APPLY

The first step in the process is to submit a basic application. This will include a brief overview of your organization's work and alignment with this funding opportunity. We are available to consult with applicants — and encourage a consult — prior to the basic application deadline. You can submit a [request for a consultation](#) on our website.

Begin a new basic application by accessing our application portal. A Word document template will be available on our website so you can prepare your application in advance.

If your organization has already registered for portal access, you can continue to use your established credentials to log in; however, once logged in you will be asked to update your password due to our new software system.

If you are a new applicant or need access to the portal, you will need to register. New applicants may set up an account through our portal.

If you need assistance, contact our Impact Administration team at impactadmin@healthforward.org or 816-241-7006.

Our impact strategists will review submitted proposals October 16 through mid-November. As part of our due diligence process, we may seek additional information to help deepen our understanding of your work.

We expect to announce the 2026 Strengthening for Impact Gift partners in January 2026.

REVIEW CRITERIA

Applications will be evaluated based on:

- Alignment with Health Forward's purpose areas — People, Place, Platform, and Power goals.
- Clarity and feasibility of the proposed capacity strengthening or resilience plans.
- Potential to sustain or grow in:
 - Organizational impact (e.g., increased organizational strength, fiscal capacity, leadership effectiveness)
 - Collaborations (e.g., stronger networks and connections among community leaders and other nonprofit organizations in the region)
- Demonstration of community engagement and/or power sharing.
- Leadership by and for communities of color and/or rural populations.

SUPPORT BEYOND THE GIFT

In addition to gift dollars, funded partners will have access to learning opportunities and additional support. Once partners are selected, Health Forward will collaborate with them to identify needs that may include training, shared tools or technologies, contracted services, learning cohorts, etc.





HERE'S WHAT WE MEAN WHEN WE SAY...

Health Forward has developed a [glossary of terms](#) to create shared understanding internally and externally with partners that is available on our website. This includes terms commonly used by Health Forward and relevant to this funding opportunity.

Grants to gifts

Health Forward now provides funding support by gifts, while continuing to make grants in some particular instances. We believe we are best positioned to foster an equitable philanthropic practice by making gifts versus grants as a key tool in supporting organizations whose work is aligned with our mission/purpose. A change to gifting centers our relationships with our partners and reflects our core values. We continue to grant to government, quasi-governmental organizations, or nonprofits without a 501(c)(3) designation to ensure our funding is used for permissible purposes.

Power

"Power is the ability to change the rules."

*Rashad Robinson, Color of Change
in Fast Company*

As a funder, we cannot authentically advance equity until we understand our own power and privilege related to our partners and the communities we serve. As we grow our understanding, we are better able to leverage and share our power to amplify the power that exists among our community partners.

Power sharing

Power sharing refers to inclusive decision-making which redistributes power, money, and resources to people and communities (e.g., people of color, people who live in rural communities, and specific socio-economic groups) that have historically been excluded from power. Sharing power requires nurturing transparent, trusting relationships, and co-creating strategies and solutions with people closest to the challenges to advance health equity.

Small/grassroots organizations

Organizations where local people work together to find solutions to issues in their community that advance health equity. They can be highly diverse in infrastructure, mission, and impact. Grassroots organizations reflect the voices of those people most affected by the issue being addressed and are responsive to and largely led by members of impacted communities.

Leadership development

Preparing and connecting leaders to grow, increase the effectiveness of their organizations, and work within and across their communities to support systemic change that promotes health equity, race equity, and economically just systems.

Health equity

Health equity means that everyone has a fair and just opportunity to be healthy. It requires actively removing obstacles to health that drive health disparities — barriers that are rooted in structural racism and economic inequity, such as poverty, discrimination, and their consequences.



Racial equity

Racial equity is both an outcome and a process. As an outcome, we achieve racial equity when race no longer determines one's socioeconomic outcomes, when everyone has what they need to thrive, no matter where they live. As a process, we apply racial equity when the people most affected by structural racial inequity are meaningfully involved in the creation and implementation of the institutional policies and practices that impact their lives.

Economic equity

Economic equity is both an outcome and a process. As an outcome, we achieve economic equity when how much money someone has no longer determines one's outcomes, when everyone has what they need to thrive, no matter their income. As a process, we apply economic equity when the people most affected by intergenerational poverty are meaningfully involved in the creation and implementation of the institutional policies and practices that impact their lives.

ABOUT HEALTH FORWARD

Health Forward Foundation is supporting and building inclusive, powerful, and healthy communities by prioritizing people who experience the greatest injustices in health outcomes. Through leadership, advocacy, and resources, we are championing an equitable future that will serve us all. Since we began partnering with nonprofit organizations in 2005, Health Forward has awarded more than \$435 million to address community health needs.

We invite you to learn more about Health Forward Foundation by [visiting our website](#).

