

The Community Health Fund's Grant Program Guide

Building Bridges to Better Health

Updated February 2012

Our Grantmaking Mission: Health Care Legacies

The Community Health Fund (CHF) carries out a unique function for John Muir Health: distributing grants to nonprofit organizations working to improve the health and well-being of medically uninsured, underinsured, underserved, and vulnerable populations most at-risk for poor health in central and east Contra Costa County.

Since its inception in 1997, the most valuable achievements derived from CHF funding have been the start-up and/or expansion of health care programs and services that continue to improve and maintain the health of uninsured, underinsured and underserved people of all ages. Health care legacies remain from programs we have funded, and it is the governing board's highest priority to continue its support for lasting health care programs that people need now and into the future to stay healthy.

Our Grantmaking Agendas

Core Grantmaking Agenda

Community-based clinics and ancillary health care services, *our primary grantmaking focus*, are challenged in several ways: (1) responding to increased demand for medical, dental and behavioral health services now exacerbated by the growing numbers of unemployed and uninsured; (2) implementing electronic health records (EHR), a massive undertaking; and (3) transitioning into a "treating the whole person" approach to health care that emphasizes and financially rewards health outcomes.

In response to these challenges, our core grantmaking agenda is to: (1) increase access to health care for those who need and cannot afford it; (2) increase the availability of health care where there are gaps in service; and (3) support community-based clinics with implementing EHRs and adapting to the changing approach to health care. To help clinics with these challenges, the CHF chooses to work proactively and strategically with them. Our strategy is to deliberately structure our grants to help the clinics achieve both an immediate and lasting effect in both services provided and internal systems changes.

Secondary Grantmaking Agenda

The downturn in the economy that started several years ago continues to challenge all nonprofit organizations as they try to keep up with their share of the growing demand for services. Separate from community clinics, other nonprofit organizations are increasingly challenged as well in key areas of functioning including, administrative, program and governance leadership; strategizing, planning, resource development and financial management; and tracking and evaluating costs and benefits associated with programs. Health care providers don't work alone to improve the health of their patients or the community; an array of complementary wellness programs and support services offered by other nonprofit organizations are essential and needed as well.

In response, the CHF's secondary grantmaking agenda focuses on helping other nonprofit organizations to: (1) sustain and grow their complementary wellness and support services, (2) work more deliberately in partnership with community clinics, and (3) accomplish internal systems, personnel and resource improvements. Our strategy is to deliberately structure our grants to help clinics and their partner organizations achieve both an immediate and lasting effect in both services provided and internal systems changes.

Our Grantmaking Strategies

Community clinics and other nonprofit organizations can request CHF funding to: (1) plan, implement and evaluate a multi-year health initiative, or (2) plan and implement a health program or complementary wellness program for one year. The CHF chooses to remain flexible in its approach to grantmaking; therefore, it is possible that a program being funded one-year-at-a-time could evolve into a multi-year health initiative. The points below are the framework for discussions leading to the development of an initiative or program:

- Exploring a need for change and formulating a practical vision for making it happen
- Developing a written plan of action for achieving the health improvements envisioned
- Implementing the plan of action for a defined period of time to achieve documented results, prove its value, and implement strategies for sustaining the level of effort
- Conducting a professional evaluation of the planning and implementing stages that assesses and documents actions taken, results achieved, and strategies utilized.

Our capable staff guides organizations through a discussion of these points and helps organizations to decide which grantmaking strategy is best for them to pursue, *a health initiative or program*.

Health Initiative

This funding strategy is designed to help community-based clinics and ancillary health improvement organizations accomplish systems change that increases access to care and addresses gaps in services, which requires a staffing and financial commitment over several years. This path requires organizations to shape a new vision, commit to doing things differently, and commit to sustaining the change.

Health initiative priorities: (1) provide high quality affordable primary and specialty care, dental care, and behavioral health care; and (2) offer innovative wellness and supportive programs that encourage people to maintain good health and wellness, stay active and physically fit, and be socially engaged with others and in their community.

An initiative is a way for an organization to employ new strategies for delivering needed care, measuring and documenting its value, and sustaining the level of effort after CHF funding has ended. Successful health initiatives emerge from careful planning, capable implementation, and documentation of results.

Our staff will guide an organization through the process of shaping a health initiative to the point of readiness for funding.

Annual Program Support

This funding strategy extends our grantmaking into the diverse realm of wellness programs and supportive services, including, but not limited to, health education, case management, social support, access to fresh food, healthy eating and nutrition, and support for aging-in-place. Within central and east Contra Costa County there is a vast array of wellness and support services that complement health care services provided in clinical settings. These programs address common human needs that help to keep people active, socially engaged, and healthy. In many cases, they make extensive use of trained volunteers needed to augment services provided by paid professional staff.

Many of these programs are the “safety net” for children, adults and seniors, and their services are essential complements to health care. Since 2007, these programs and services have endured significant and ongoing reductions in revenue from public and private sources, fraying our safety net and putting at risk the health of our community.

The financial base for these needed services is eroding and new strategies are needed to help organizations shift to more stable and sustainable sources of income, and to continue their program partnerships with health care providers. Through this grant program we are open to learning how a program grant could help to increase an organization’s services in relation to growing demand while simultaneously helping the organization shift to more stable and sustainable income sources.

Our staff will guide interested organizations through the process of shaping a program through readiness for annual support.

The Funding Process

Our funding process is a search for organizational partners who share our mission of breaking down barriers that limit access to health care and developing new forms of care when needed. Our “search process” does not start with a proposal; it is instead a series of discussions intended to identify visionary leadership, strategies for initiatives and programs, and key program staff. Taking into consideration an array of readiness factors, our capable staff will tailor a timetable for discussions and actions that can lead to formulating and funding a multi-year initiative or an annual program.

The first step in our process is to begin discussing ideas for a health initiative or program. Engaging in a discussion with CHF staff doesn’t require being prepared with a proposal, but we would like you to come prepared to share facts and circumstances that point to a need for action, your vision for what that action might entail, and why you and your organization would want, *and are best suited*, to lead an effort.

Together, our discussions will explore the feasibility for action, what it would take for your organization to achieve a state of readiness, who suitable collaborators might be, and how a written plan of action could be created. We don’t, and can’t, pre-determine how long it will take an organization to be ready for funding; therefore we do not have any “application or proposal” deadlines.

Instead, you can count on the CHF staff to guide you through discussions right up to the point where we both agree there is readiness for funding and it is time for you to document in a proposal how your initiative or program will be conducted and the budget revenue and costs for implementation. We prefer that all implementation grants awarded have grant periods that start and end: (1) July 1 – June 30 or (2) January 1 – December 31. Please keep these time frames in mind as you develop your plan for a health initiative or program.

Funding Eligibility Standards

The Community Health Fund’s governing board has established minimum standards for all organizations interested in funding for a health initiative or program. These standards identify our commitment to improving the health of central and east county residents, support for local nonprofit organizations, and emphasis on the importance of organizational leadership, financial stability and capacity to sustain what we might fund.

Geographic Scope

The Community Health Fund limits its financial support for health initiatives and programs conducted within central and east Contra Costa County, and in direct proportion that benefits residents and communities in this area. If an organization intends to serve a wider geographic area, other sources of funding must be obtained for the expanded scope of work. An organization based out-of-county must have already established a relevant program track-record and physical presence in central or east County prior to seeking CHF funding.

Tax-Exempt Status

The Community Health Fund limits its financial support to health initiatives and programs conducted by currently tax-exempt, 501(c)(3), nonprofit corporations. The CHF will not consider an organization for funding until its corporate and tax-exemption status has been in effect for at least a full twelve (12) months. The CHF does not use fiscal agents to accept and administer its grants for any purpose or on behalf of any group.

Organizational Mission & Programs

The Community Health Fund limits its financial support to health initiatives and programs conducted by organizations whose mission, programs, staffing, and track-record reflects a commitment to conducting work that tangibly improves the health of uninsured, under-insured, and underserved populations.

Organizational Leadership

The Community Health Fund limits its financial support to health initiatives and programs conducted by nonprofit organizations with experienced executive leadership in place, a full complement of highly engaged governing board members who best represent the interests of the organization and the local community it serves, and an appropriate level of experienced initiative or program leadership in place and capable of conducting the work to be funded and reporting outcomes.

Financial Stability

The Community Health Fund limits its financial support to health initiatives and programs conducted by financially stable nonprofit organizations with appropriate internal financial systems and accounting staff. Organizations will be asked to share current and year-end financial statements, most recent audits and 990 tax returns, and the current amount of unrestricted operating cash in reserve.

Resource Development Capabilities

The Community Health Fund limits its financial support to health initiatives and programs conducted by nonprofit organizations that have established systems and personnel in place dedicated to developing revenue from an array of sources. Especially important is a track-record of obtaining other sources of funding to sustain needed programs as CHF start-up or expansion funding declines and expires.

Ethical Principles Guide the Funding Process

The Board of Directors has established and adheres to the highest standards of ethics in conducting grantmaking, which includes avoiding any real or perceived conflicts of interest in the grantmaking process. These policies encompass actions, side conversations, and lobbying of CHF Board members and staff that could be misconstrued by an agency as having a preferred advantage in the CHF funding process. Our intent is to encourage everyone to participate and to ensure that funding decisions are made solely on the merits of a plan presented and the qualifications the applying organization presents for itself.

The policies guiding how CHF Board and staff conduct the funding process include, but are not limited to:

- Refusing to accept any gifts, gratuities or services of any value from organizations seeking funding or that have been funded
- Avoiding any conversations that might encourage, imply or infer an unfair advantage for an organization interested in seeking funding
- Disclosing in writing any conflicts of interest, and if a conflict exists, removing oneself from participating in the funding process
- Agreeing to maintain in strictest confidence any confidential and/or proprietary information received about or from any organization seeking or receiving funding

The Role of CHF Board and Staff

The Board of Directors has devised a division of labor for conducting the Community Health Fund's grantmaking. The Board as a whole and its members are not involved in the preliminary stages of vetting an organization and its idea for funding; this function is delegated to and carried out by Community Health Fund staff.

Once CHF staff determines that an organization and plan is ready for funding, the Board of Directors enters the funding process by meeting with organizational representatives to discuss the written plan and proposal for a proposed health initiative or program and to ascertain the capabilities and commitment of organizational and program leadership.

Once funding is approved, the Board expects staff to monitor performance, intervene when problems arise, assure that reports are submitted on time, and organize meetings with funded organizations to discuss the efficacy of strategies used and outcomes achieved.

Expectations Associated with Funding

When the Community Health Fund's grantmaking process culminates in funding for a health initiative or program, a funded organization receives a grant award letter. This letter states clearly the work the CHF is funding, the grant period, expected outcomes as described in the organization's proposal, and defined reporting periods. This letter is signed by the staff and board leaders of the CHF and the funded organization, which signifies agreement to the terms and conditions for funding contained in the letter, each of us keeps a copy as a reminder of why funding was awarded.

During the grant period Community Health Fund staff will want to be kept informed of any challenges or major developments. On specified dates mid-way through and at the conclusion of a grant period organizations will be required to submit written reports; CHF staff will provide a format for these reports.

We Invite All Inquiries

We invite all inquiries, and will quickly schedule a meeting to discuss an organization's vision, capabilities, and strategies for improving the health and wellness of medically uninsured, underinsured, and underserved populations. Please contact the Community Health Fund's Program Officer at (925) 941-3100 to arrange a meeting.