



Collaboration & Innovation

*Investing in Strategic Networks and Approaches that Tackle Complex Challenges
Open from April 20 to May 18, 2026 at 5PM EST*

What We are Funding

People and organizations in Western North Carolina have a long tradition of working together to improve community health, wellbeing, opportunity and access. This grant will support collaborations spanning organizations, sectors and geographic locations to plan, pilot and scale breakthrough solutions to complex community challenges in Western North Carolina.

Community-led collaboration and innovation are inherently complex processes that defy simple definitions. For the purposes of this grant opportunity, Dogwood Health Trust is using the following working definitions:

Collaboration is a process of multiple organizations sharing responsibility, resources, and decision-making to address complex place-based challenges that no single organization can solve alone.

Collaboration often features some or all of the following:

- Multistakeholder and/or cross-sector engagement and coordination
 - Public, nonprofit, private and community partners working together toward common goals
- Trust and long-term commitment
 - Strong ties between leaders and organizations
- Shared governance structure
 - Pooling expertise, funding, networks and leadership
- Orientation toward complex challenges that no single actor can solve
 - Systems barriers such as workforce gaps, rural health and educational disparities, infrastructure needs and economic opportunity
- Place-based focus
 - Anchored in local identity, assets, culture and community dynamics.

Innovation is place-based applied creativity, focused on developing, adapting and scaling promising efforts to dramatically improve the health and wellbeing of all people and communities in Western North Carolina

Grants will range in size from \$50,000 to \$500,000 total. Funds are generally paid within a 12-month period, and the collaboration work may span 12 to 24 months depending on the scope and timeline of the work.

Eligibility:

Organizations with emerging or well-established collaboration in Western North Carolina are encouraged to apply for this opportunity. This grant opportunity will prioritize collaborations that are pursuing innovation to address complex challenges aligned to Dogwood's strategic priority areas of housing, education, economic opportunity and/or health & wellness. We value partnerships that are rooted in shared goals and commitment, rather than those formed solely to pursue this grant opportunity.

Collaboratives made up of organizations working in the Qualla Boundary and/or 18 counties of Western North Carolina are eligible to apply. Please refer to [our FAQs for a comprehensive list of the 18 qualifying counties](#).

A single organization – the Hub Applicant – will apply on behalf of the collaborative. Hub Applicants may be 501(c)(3) nonprofit public charities; government, quasi and non-governmental organizations; faith-based organizations; or K-12 schools, colleges and universities. The Hub organization administers all grant funds, including managing the administrative and logistical coordination of the collaborative. Funds should be allocated among the collaborative partners in a thoughtful way that maximizes collaboration, aligns with program implementation and accelerates impacts for communities in WNC.

Learning Support:

Forming and sustaining meaningful collaboration requires specific skills and support. To that end, collaborative groups will receive individualized coaching and technical assistance to support collaborative decision-making, power sharing and managing evolving needs or potential roadblocks within their groups. Each collaborative will also designate a delegate from their group to attend monthly learning cohort sessions over a 12-month period. These sessions will focus on strengthening leadership within collaborative groups and expanding coordination and shared learnings between collaborative groups across WNC.

Application Process

This grant opportunity will proceed in two stages, and the lead Hub Applicant should apply on behalf of the collaborative. In Stage 1, interested applicants should submit a Letter of Intent (LOI). Dogwood Health Trust will review submitted LOIs and determine which applicants will move forward to Stage 2 to complete a full application. Stage 2 applicants will complete a full application in early summer which may include an additional formal application, site visits and conversations to better understand the proposed collaboration. Final award decisions will be made after review of the full applications.

LOIs are accepted from April 20 to May 18, 2026. All LOIs must be submitted through the Dogwood Health Trust website at dht.org/grantmaking.

Criteria and Review Factors:

Proposals will be reviewed based on three core factors: 1) the strength of the collaboration, 2) the potential impact of the innovation, 3) the capacity of the lead hub. Guiding questions for the review include the following:

- Strength of the collaborative
 - Are the right partners engaged at the right levels?
 - Is there demonstrated effectiveness in coordination and community engagement and impact?
 - Is the collaborative decision-making and governance structure well-defined?
- Potential of the proposed innovation
 - Does this effort develop, adapt or scale a novel approach?
 - How will the people and communities served be dramatically better off because of this effort?
 - What is the potential to scale this effort to transform systems that serve people and communities in WNC?
- Capacity of the proposed Hub
 - Does the hub champion a shared vision that was created by and for the community?
 - Does the hub effectively coordinate programming?

- o Does the hub cultivate and mobilize resources and partnerships?

LOI Requirements & Recommendations:

The Hub Applicant will apply on behalf of the collaborative, listing the members of the collaborative and explaining their shared history.

The LOI should:

- Explain the collaborative effort, program or strategy the grant will support.
- Define the necessary roles and functions of the collaborative partners within the effort and describe each partner's commitment to the collaborative's purpose, coordination and communities served. (Note: If your LOI is successful and you are invited to the full application phase, you will be asked to submit documentation demonstrating commitment from each participating organization.
- Propose a budget reflecting, at minimum, distribution of administrative funding and collaborative funding according to the defined roles.

An ideal LOI will demonstrate how the collaborative will:

- Address a top priority for the region, based on community input and need.
- Contribute to one or more of Dogwood's strategic priority areas (housing, education, economic opportunity, health and wellness).
- Serve people or communities who have experienced disinvestment or disconnection.
- Bring together multiple strategically aligned partners (see definition at dht.org/grantmaking).
- Reflect a long-term, shared vision.
- Respond to a ready environment (i.e., the time and environment are ideal).
- Have or commit to developing an explicit plan for how strategic decision-making power will be shared among partners, served communities and those most affected.
- Articulate what success might look like.
- Incorporate plans for measuring progress, learning and evaluating how people and communities will be better off because of this effort.

LETTER OF INTENT QUESTIONS

The following questions make up the Collaboration & Innovation LOI process. They are included here as a preview. All LOIs must be submitted through Dogwood Health Trust's website at dht.org/grantmaking.

1. Tell us about the key aspects of your organization's work and how leading this collaborative as the hub contributes to your organization's mission.
 - a. In your response, please share why your organization will be an effective Hub, specifically how your organization will champion an inclusive community vision, coordinate programming and partnerships to advance community impact and mobilize resources to create a region where every generation can live, learn, earn and thrive, with dignity and opportunity for all.
2. Describe the purpose of your request. Please address:
 - a. **Collaborative Project Overview:** Provide a summary of the innovative effort your collaborative is proposing, including the key activities. Describe how this work addresses a top priority for the region and the specific change your collaboration is working to achieve in Western North Carolina.
 - b. **Innovation:** How does this collaboration dramatically improve health and wellbeing in the communities you serve? How does it support communities to re-imagine what's possible to scale creative solutions that resolve complex challenges? How will you know the community you serve is better off as a result of this work?
 - c. **Collaboration:** Describe the partners involved in your collaborative, their roles and responsibilities and how they will work together. Explain how the collaboration will function, including how partners will share responsibility, decision-making and resources.
3. Please describe how this collaborative project is shaped by the people and community you serve. What type of information is the collaborative using to help understand the context, needs or perspectives of these individuals (*e.g., feedback from the people and community you will serve, needs assessments, census data, community conversations, etc.*)
4. Which of Dogwood's strategic priority areas of housing, education, economic opportunity, and/or health & wellness does your proposed collaborative work most closely align with?
5. Please provide a brief narrative explaining the primary expenses of the collaborative project. Address how the requested Dogwood funds will be used to support the collaborative effort and key activities. If possible, describe current and anticipated sources of funding (committed or pending) that will support this work beyond this request.