

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

APPLICATION DEADLINES

1. Letter of Intent (LOI) is due by 5:00 p.m. on November 20, 2023.
2. Full application must be received by 5:00 p.m. on December 18, 2023.
3. Funded award begins February 20, 2024.

BioNexus KC is pleased to issue a Request for Proposal (RFP) on behalf of Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas City (Blue KC) for a portfolio of sponsored research grants:

Transforming KC: Health Outcomes Research Grants

This grant is to be submitted to BioNexus KC for funding consideration. The following instruction categories are provided below:

- Background
- Eligibility
- Scope
- Review Criteria
- Application Procedures
- Review Process
- Submission Instructions

BACKGROUND

Blue KC, the largest not-for-profit health insurer in Missouri and the only not-for-profit commercial health insurer in Kansas City, has been part of the Kansas City community since 1938. Their mission is to provide affordable access to healthcare and improve the health of their members. Being mission driven, they have championed regional health and wellness for more than 80 years. As a partner in health, Blue KC recognizes that health is created outside of the doctor's office and is spearheading a regional commitment to health equity through research.

In the Kansas City region (KC region), significant health disparities exist for those in Black/African American and Brown communities. These disparities persist in life expectancy, mental health, healthcare access, elderly care, maternal/fetal health, among others. Significant work is being undertaken to identify innovative approaches to care that will ultimately lead to the reduction in these health disparities. Blue KC understands the importance for all Kansas Citians to be able to access necessary health services, and it's clear that more research is needed. The Transforming KC: Health Outcomes Research Grants focus on coming together and identifying ways our region can collaboratively work together to infuse equity into research and healthcare.

Through this program, Blue KC will fund two awards focused on interventions aimed at reducing health disparities:

- The first award will focus on addressing inequities associated with maternal and child health.
- The second award will be more overarching and focus on research that addresses health disparities and improves outcomes in general.

Maternal and Child Health Outcomes

The national maternal mortality rate (MMR) and severe maternal morbidity (SMM) have increased approximately 200% over the past 20 years. African American and American Indian/Alaska Native women and birthing people experience the highest burden of poor outcomes, with Asian and Hispanic/Latina women experiencing higher rates than non-Hispanic White women. In Kansas, Black mothers and other ethnic minorities account for 13% of births but 60% of all maternal deaths. In both Kansas and Missouri, Black women are two times more likely to die from pregnancy-related causes than non-Hispanic White women. Blue KC acknowledges that social and political determinants of health are significant drivers of these maternal and child health outcomes. The KC region needs solutions that address longstanding structural inequities while eliminating avoidable, racialized disparities.

Beyond mere validation of assumptions, this grant will support innovative insights and intervention research to address inequities in care and outcome improvements in maternal and child health, specifically for women of color, who bear an unfairly disproportionate burden of SMM and MMR. Research organizations or community-based organizations focused on maternal and child health are invited to submit a research proposal aimed to improve maternal and child health disparities in underinvested communities, consistent with the scope of this specific RFP. Proposals submitted to this grant RFP will also be considered for the Comprehensive Grant award if they fit the criteria. A single award will be determined from individual proposals and will not exceed \$50,000 for one year. The award is intended to exploit investigator and facility strengths leading to highly competitive proposals directed toward future external funding and scalable innovation.

Comprehensive Health Inequities

This second Transforming KC: Health Outcomes Research Grant will support innovative research to address health inequities that exist in black and brown Kansas City regional communities. This second grant, the Comprehensive Health Inequities grant, focuses on innovative insights and intervention research that look at all areas of healthcare where disparities exist.

Research proposals can include but are not limited to substance abuse, mental/behavioral health, access to care, elderly healthcare, children's healthcare, cardiovascular outcomes, population health, diabetes prevention/treatment, and incidence of obesity. Research organizations or community-based organizations, including area hospitals, focused on these areas of research are invited to submit a research proposal aimed to decrease disparities in underinvested communities, consistent with the scope of this specific RFP. Proposals submitted to the maternal and child health grant RFP will also be considered for this award if they fit the criteria. A single award will be determined from individual proposals and will not exceed \$50,000 for one year. This award is intended to exploit investigator and facility strengths leading to highly competitive proposals directed toward future external funding and scalable innovation.

ELIGIBILITY

Applicants and principal investigator organizations must reside in the Blue KC 32 county service area (30 Counties in NW MO and 2 Counties in KS: Wyandotte and Johnson).

Blue KC and BioNexus KC are committed to promoting community collaboration and partnerships. Accordingly, **proposals that leverage multiple providers or impact large patient populations** will be given preferential consideration for this funding program. While not a requirement, collaboration with other area researchers and local institutions will be an important consideration during the proposal review process.

Awards will be made only to those organizations designated as a tax exempt 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization. In the case where multiple organizations are involved (e.g., a research organization assisted by a financial organization partner which is a 501(c)(3)), a lead institution must be identified. At the time of proposal submission, all investigators, or representatives of the 501(c)(3) organization acting as financial partners, must fully disclose any conflict of interest with Blue KC and BioNexus KC.

As a condition of eligibility, an organization, including but not limited to any of its partners, affiliates, subsidiaries, investigators, or representatives (collectively, “Organization”), must agree that if it is selected for a grant award, Blue KC will have the exclusive right of first refusal to purchase any resultant and documented intellectual property created by the organization in the utilization of, or arising from, the Transforming KC: Health Outcomes Research Grant.

GRANT #1 SCOPE:

Maternal and Child Health Outcomes Grant proposals must be applied research projects that improve not only the quality of the healthcare process but focus on health outcomes for mothers and/or children. Proposals should also aim to reduce health disparities; improve effectiveness, efficiency, or efficacy of maternal and/or child healthcare; and/or improve access to maternal and/or child healthcare.

Basic research projects will not be accepted. Blue KC has identified maternal and child healthcare outcomes that impact Black and Brown communities as its priority area for this grant. Successful proposals will clearly detail the research approach to be utilized.

Proposals should address the following suggested criteria to the best of their abilities:

- Blue KC requests research-based proposals that evaluate changes in health disparities to positively impact maternal and child health outcomes.
- Applicants may identify their own combination of outcomes. It is encouraged to include at least one clinical or one healthcare utilization outcome measure, but it is not required.
- Applicants are encouraged to leverage other funding sources to use in combination with requested Blue KC grant funds to execute the proposed project. Blue KC grant funds can be leveraged to support a larger project effort if the aims are still specific to these funds.
- Blue KC recommends the use of evidence-based approaches to address maternal and child health disparities in underinvested communities.

Proposals consistent with the following thematic areas are encouraged, but not required:

- Maternal and/or child health interventions with communities living in marginalized conditions and individuals experiencing socioeconomic challenges in urban/suburban communities
- Use of non-traditional care practices, including doulas or centering programs (group or pregnancy support) as a medical or behavioral recommendation, in lieu of or in conjunction with other hospital-based care
- Access to quality, equitable (including culturally competent), and meaningful prenatal and postnatal care
- Treatment for perinatal / postpartum depression
- Use of a Social Ecological framework as the design and/or overall approach
- Engaging Primary Care Providers and care teams to facilitate referrals to community-based organizations to ensure closure of the referral loop and evaluate impact using outcome measures
- Collaboration and/or community partnership will be an important consideration during the proposal review process

GRANT #2 SCOPE:

Comprehensive Health Inequities and Outcomes Research Grant proposals must be applied research projects that improve not only the quality of the healthcare process but focus on improving health outcomes and reduce health disparities specific to underserved Kansas City communities. Proposals should also aim to improve effectiveness, efficiency, or efficacy of regional healthcare; and/or improve access to healthcare overall.

Basic research projects will not be accepted. Blue KC has identified health inequities impacting Black and Brown communities as its priority subject area for this grant. Successful proposals will clearly detail the research approach to be utilized.

Proposals should address the following suggested criteria to the best of their abilities:

- Blue KC requests research-based proposals that evaluate changes in health disparities to positively impact health outcomes in Black and Brown communities.
- Applicants may identify their own combination of outcomes. It is encouraged to include at least one clinical or one healthcare utilization outcome measure, but it is not required.
- Applicants are encouraged to leverage other funding sources to use in combination with requested Blue KC grant funds to execute the proposed project. Blue KC grant funds can be leveraged to support a larger project effort if the aims are still specific to these funds.
- Blue KC recommends the use of evidence-based approaches to develop comprehensive proposals that address health disparities in underinvested communities.

While all areas of healthcare and outcomes-based research will be relevant and considered for funding, proposals consistent with the following thematic areas are encouraged:

- Substance abuse and mental/behavioral health interventions with communities living in marginalized conditions and individuals experiencing socioeconomic challenges in urban/suburban communities
 - Access to quality, equitable (including culturally competent), and meaningful care
 - Elderly Healthcare and the treatment for chronic conditions and comorbidities experienced more often by elderly populations (including degenerative diseases, physical disabilities, and mental illnesses)
 - Physical condition and the incidence of obesity
 - Use of a Social Ecological framework as the design and overall approach
 - Engaging Primary Care Providers and care teams to facilitate referrals to community-based organizations to ensure closure of the referral loop and evaluate impact using outcome measures
 - Collaboration and/or community partnership will be an important consideration during the proposal review process
-

REVIEW CRITERIA

- A. Proposals must address important and relevant question(s) related to the SCOPE of this RFP listed above.
- B. Studies will be expected to produce results that address clinical issues pertinent to Blue KC member subpopulations, have the potential to impact a larger population beyond the research proposal, and yield actionable interventions that support its mission.
- C. Proposals should describe how the proposed grant support will facilitate the development and submission of a proposal(s) seeking external funding from government and/or private agencies. The long-term expectations regarding the institution's extended research programs and potential for expanded research in related areas of research should also be well articulated.
- D. Merit review criteria are essentially the same as those used by federal granting agencies such as NIH and NSF. Criteria include scientific and technical significance, innovation, approach, and likelihood of success of achieving external funding.
- E. Qualifications and research experience of the Principal Investigator, Co-Principal Investigators and collaborating investigators are important considerations.
- F. Proposals must present a realistic assessment of the scope of work proposed for the one-year period of funding with delineated milestones. The feasibility of the one-year period only pertains to completing the outlined experiments and not beholden to specific results.
- G. Appropriateness of the proposed budget.
- H. Research publication plan, if applicable.
- I. The potential of research to generate new innovations and quality of commercialization plan; however, none of the Blue KC grants will fund app or software development for private or commercial purposes.
- J. Overall scale of the entire research project.

Upon receipt, proposals will undergo an administrative review to ensure eligibility, compliance with submission requirements, and appropriate institutional signatures and assurances are obtained. Proposals will be thoroughly evaluated for scientific and technical merit and assigned NIH-type priority scores. Upon receipt of peer review scores, BioNexus KC will rank the proposals and make a funding recommendation for consideration by Blue KC. Final award decisions will be made by BioNexus KC and Blue KC based on priority scores, recommendations, and available funds.

APPLICATION PROCEDURE – Letter of Intent

An **original** one-page letter of intent (LOI) should be submitted to the office of Daniel Kennedy, Vice President, BioNexus KC, by **November 20th, 2023, before 5:00 p.m.** Letters of intent must include the following:

- A. The principal investigator's name, title, organization, address, phone number, and email address.
 - B. A summary of your project (not to exceed 1 page) including the following information:
 - a. Brief review of the literature
 - b. Problem statement and root cause analysis of the problem
 - c. Project description
 - d. Project deliverables and associated implementation plan
 - e. Success measures
 - f. Relevance to Blue KC and potential for impact on a larger population beyond the research proposal
 - g. Funding estimate including indirect expenses
 - h. Project timeline
 - i. Potential for new innovations
 - C. Tax Identification Number, IRS letter verifying 501(c)(3) status, audited financial statement, and list of Board of Directors.
 - D. Disclosure statement of any conflict of interest for each investigator or 501(c)(3) institution acting as a financial partner.
 - E. LOIs either must bear **original signatures** of all collaborating investigators or be accompanied by appropriate commitment letters bearing **original signatures**. PDF files containing documents bearing original signatures are allowable. **Fax copies will not be accepted.**
 - F. Full proposals will be invited following the review of LOIs received. LOIs will also be used to identify appropriate scientific reviewers to be assigned to full proposals.
-

APPLICATION PROCEDURE – Full Proposals

Full proposals must be submitted to Daniel Kennedy, Vice President, BioNexus KC by **December 18, 2023, before 5:00 p.m.** The instructions for the full proposals are as follows:

- A. Full proposals should use the latest version of PHS 398 forms available electronically at <https://grants.nih.gov/grants/funding/phs398/phs398.html>. Institutional administrative review and approval of applications by all applicable stakeholder institutions must be completed prior to submission. An electronic version in editable PDF format (not imaged) of the full application with signed approval from the lead institution's signatory official must be submitted to Daniel Kennedy, Vice President, BioNexus KC prior to the stated deadline for full consideration. Full submission details provided in the "Submission Instructions" section at the end of this document.
- B. Strict compliance to the following criteria is necessary in preparing the proposal:
 - a. The Face Page should identify only the lead institution and Principal Investigator in addition to other required information about the lead institution.
 - b. The Description, Performance Sites, and Key Personnel should clearly detail collaborating investigators and institutions.
 - c. The Detailed Budget for Initial Budget Period Page must be used and should reflect the following:
 - i. Requests may be up to \$50,000 for one year.
 - ii. Salary and fringe benefits may be requested and must be in accordance with set institutional guidelines.

- iii. Indirect cost rates may not exceed 10% of total costs and must be included within the \$50,000 total limit.
 - iv. Equipment requests may not exceed 20% of the total funding request. Equipment is defined as any tangible personal property (including information technology systems) having a useful life of more than one year and a per-unit acquisition cost over \$5,000.
 - v. The budget and budget justification should only represent funds requested of Blue KC.
- d. Separate budget justification page must follow the budget page and detail the rationale for all budget requests. Supply items should be summarized within major categories.
 - e. **DO NOT INCLUDE** the Budget for Entire Proposed Period of Support Page.
 - f. The NIH biographical sketch form 398/2590, (also found at <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/forms/biosketch.html>) must be used for each investigator and **must not exceed three pages** for each investigator. The Principal Investigator's Biographical Sketch Format Pages must be first followed alphabetically (last name) by all other investigators. The bio-sketches must be provided as an appendix.
 - g. The Resources Format Page must detail resources that are to be used at the collaborating institutions toward completion of the project. Use additional pages as necessary.
 - h. **DO NOT INCLUDE** the Checklist Form Page and Personal Data Form Page
 - i. The Research Plan must be no more than 10 pages, single-line spaced, **12 pt. Arial or Times New Roman font with one-inch margins** throughout.
-

Full proposals must be organized as follows:

Problem Statement:

Provide a brief description of the problem addressed in the proposed project, its importance, and the research project that will be undertaken.

Project Description:

- a. Objectives and Activities – State the project's principal objectives and explain what activities will help accomplish these objectives. Include the research hypothesis.
- b. Significance – Detail how this project will support Blue KC's mission as described in the SCOPE section above and anticipated positive impact on Blue KC constituents (members, providers and employers). Also describe the extent of impact on any special needs, high risk or minority populations.
- c. Deliverables and Outcomes – Clearly outline the inclusion and exclusion criteria for research subjects. Describe the project's deliverables and expected outcomes. Define outcomes measures, and any applicable benchmarks or comparative measures. Describe pre- and post-intervention measures, and explain how control groups, subpopulations or cohorts will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the research interventions.
- d. Research Method – Describe the project's data sources, data collection methods, and analysis.
- e. Staffing & Resources – Identify the principal project staff, key partners and collaborators necessary to achieve the project's objectives. Also describe other

- resources such as in-kind services applicable to your project and identify other funding sources and amounts.
- f. Funding Sources and Budget – Provide an outline of estimated funding and a detailed budget for the project. Describe all funding contributions and/or requests. Provide details for indirect expenses. Note: Funding for indirect expenses is limited to 10% of total costs.
 - g. Communications – Describe the project communication plan. Describe special audiences (e.g., state policymakers, hospital CEOs, medical organizations, and the public) you will need to reach to achieve your project's objectives; messages you plan to deliver; and how you will deliver these messages.
 - h. Timeline – Provide a project timeline to include major milestones and communication activities. The timeline does not need to guarantee results or outcomes of a hypothesis.

Appendices must include the following:

- a. A lay executive summary of the proposal. The lay summary should be succinct, not exceeding one page in length at 12 pt. Arial or Times New Roman font with one-inch margins throughout. Please do not copy the abstract or summary statements from above. Please also use an 8th grade reading level as a reference of succinctness and simplicity of language.
 - b. Signed letters of commitment, with original signatures, from each Co-Principal Investigator, collaborative research investigator, and the President and CEO or Executive Director of collaborating organizations named in the budget must be provided as an appendix. Signatures obtained on the original letter of intent cannot be substituted for this requirement.
 - c. Proposed publication plan (of study results) in Peer-reviewed journals.
 - d. Potential for new innovations resulting from the project, intellectual property management/ownership, and pathways for commercialization
 - e. Proposed plan for scaling the project to serve the broader community
- C. **IRB approval is not required unless the proposal is funded.** Funds will not be released until a final IRB approval is received by BioNexus KC.
- D. The budget and budget justification should clearly delineate which costs will be incurred at each institution. One option is to submit a combined budget along with sub-budgets for each institution. Another option is to subcontract with collaborating institutions and provide the supporting budget form. In the case when other funding sources are proposed to be combined with anticipated Blue KC grant funds, the source of funds, funding amount, and role of the funds in the proposed project must be clearly delineated.

REVIEW PROCESS

Proposals will undergo an initial administrative review by BioNexus KC staff to assure compliance with submission requirements detailed in the RFP. Proposals will then be evaluated for scientific and technical merit by peer review and assigned NIH-type priority scores (see <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/peer/peer.html>).

Applicants may submit up to three names of peers whom they wish not to review their application. This is to avoid selection of someone with whom the applicant(s) does not wish to share the proposal or whom they feel will not provide an objective review. BioNexus KC will not select these persons when contacting potential reviewers to develop an appropriate peer review group.

Upon receipt of peer review scores, BioNexus KC will rank the proposals and make a funding recommendation for consideration by Blue KC. Individuals will be excluded from review and discussion of proposals in which they have a real or apparent conflict of interest.

In addition to the regular progress and financial reports to BioNexus KC, the principal investigators may be invited to present the project and outcomes to Blue KC at the conclusion of the grant.

SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS

1. Submit an electronic, editable PDF (not imaged) of the full application to:
Daniel Kennedy
Vice President
BioNexus KC
30 W. Pershing Rd., Suite 210
Kansas City, MO 64108
Phone: 816-753-7700
dkennedy@bionexuskc.org
2. Copy Sharon Newman (snewman@bionexuskc.org) on the electronic submission.