



Request for Proposals

Transforming KC: Health Outcomes Research Grants Program

APPLICATION DEADLINES

1. Letter of Intent (LOI) is due by 5:00 pm on May 14, 2025
2. By invitation, full proposals and applications must be received by 5:00 pm on July 25, 2025
3. Award funding begins on November 1, 2025

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. Three research proposals, not to exceed \$50,000 over a one-year period, will be awarded.

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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. Blue KC recognizes that health is created both inside and outside of the doctor's office. As a partner in health, Blue KC is continuing its commitment to the region by championing research initiatives that seek to improve health outcomes for all.

The *Transforming KC: Health Outcomes Research Grants Program* focuses on identifying healthcare innovations that can improve health and wellness for all Kansas and Missouri residents. Through this program, Blue KC will fund three awards that will support research projects focusing on Health Equity, Food as Medicine, or Mental/Behavior Health.

Scope

Health Equity

Good health shouldn't be affected by the color of our skin, the neighborhood where we live, the language we speak, our age or social class, physical disabilities, functional limitations, sexual orientation, or gender identity. Unfortunately, generations of systems and structures have contributed to health and healthcare disparities based on these and other factors. This takes a damaging toll on the physical health, mental health, and well-being of thousands of people in our communities.

Transforming KC: Health Outcomes Research Grants Program will support innovative research to address health inequities that exist in Kansas City regional communities. The scope of the Health Equity grant focuses on innovative insights and intervention research that aims to make meaningful systemic and structural changes to reduce or eliminate inequities in healthcare delivery and realize measurable improvements in health outcomes across all areas of healthcare.

Research proposals can include but are not limited to: deployment and efficacy of community health workers, substance abuse, mental/behavioral health, access to care, elderly healthcare, children's healthcare, cardiovascular outcomes, population health, diabetes prevention/treatment, incidence of obesity, and use of GLP-1 RA medications. 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 inequities in underinvested communities, consistent with the scope of this specific RFP. Health Equity awards will not exceed \$50,000 and the award will not exceed a one-year period. This award is

intended to support the acquisition of proof-of-concept data that enables investigators to create highly competitive proposals directed toward future external funding and scalable innovation.

Food as Medicine

Access to nutritious food should not be determined by socioeconomic status, geographic location, or cultural background. Yet, food insecurity and limited access to healthy food options disproportionately affect underinvested communities, exacerbating chronic diseases and impacting overall well-being. Recognizing the powerful connection between food and health, the *Transforming KC: Health Outcomes Research Grants Program* will support innovative research that aims to integrate food as medicine principles within Kansas City region communities.

The scope of the Food as Medicine grant focuses on research that explores the deployment, efficacy, and scalability of food-based interventions to improve health outcomes. This includes, but is not limited to, programs that provide medically tailored meals, produce prescriptions, nutrition education, and community-based food access initiatives. The program aims to foster systemic and structural changes that establish sustainable food as medicine models, leading to measurable improvements in chronic disease management, preventive care, and overall health.

Research proposals can include, but are not limited to, studies on:

- The impact of produce prescription programs on diabetes management and cardiovascular health.
- The impact of food as medicine programs on mental and behavioral health.
- Community-based interventions that integrate nutrition education, hands-on food preparation workshops, and facilitated access to affordable produce.
- The role of community-based food hubs and urban agriculture in increasing access to healthy food options in underinvested neighborhoods/communities.
- The use of technology to personalize nutrition interventions and improve dietary adherence.
- The deployment and efficacy of community mental health workers in connecting underserved populations to food as medicine programs.

Research organizations, community-based organizations, including area hospitals, and food-focused not for profits are invited to submit research proposals aimed at decreasing food insecurity and improving health outcomes in underinvested communities, consistent with the scope of this specific RFP. Food as medicine awards will not exceed \$50,000, and the award will not exceed a one-year period. This award is intended to support the acquisition of proof-of-concept data that enables investigators to create highly competitive proposals directed toward future external funding and scalable innovation.

Mental and Behavior Health

Mental and behavioral health should not be determined by factors such as race, socioeconomic status, geographic location, or access to care and resources. Unfortunately, systemic inequities have created significant disparities in mental and behavioral healthcare, resulting in disproportionately negative outcomes for underinvested and under resourced communities. The *Transforming KC: Health Outcomes Research Grants Program* will support innovative research that addresses these disparities within the Kansas City region.

The scope of this grant focuses on research that identifies, evaluates, and implements interventions designed to reduce and improve mental and behavioral health inequities. This includes, but is not limited to, projects that address access to culturally competent care, the impact of social determinants on mental health, and the integration of mental health services into community settings. The program aims to foster systemic and structural changes that lead to measurable improvements in mental and behavioral health outcomes for underinvested populations.

Research proposals can include, but are not limited to, studies on:

- The deployment and efficacy of community mental health workers in connecting underserved populations to mental and behavior health programs.
- The impact of social determinants of health on mental and behavioral health.
- The use of technology to expand access to mental and behavioral health care.
- The development and evaluation of culturally adapted mental health interventions.
- Strategies to improve access to mental and behavioral health services in rural and urban underserved areas.
- The integration of mental and behavioral health services into primary care settings.
- Research focused on substance use disorders and co-occurring mental health conditions.
- Research focused on youth mental health- prevention and intervention, trauma and adverse childhood experiences, social and cultural factors, technology and social media, suicide prevent.

Research organizations, community-based organizations, including area hospitals, and mental health-focused non-profits are invited to submit research proposals aimed at decreasing inequities in underinvested communities, consistent with the scope of this specific RFP. Mental/Behavioral Health Equity awards will not exceed \$50,000, and the award will not exceed a one-year period. This award is intended to support the acquisition of proof-of-concept data that enables investigators to create highly competitive proposals directed toward future external funding and scalable innovation.

Review Criteria

- A. Proposals must address important and relevant question(s) as detailed in the SCOPE of this RFP.
- 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 (LOI)

An **original** one-page letter of intent (LOI) should be submitted to the office of Randall Logan, Scientific Director, BioNexus KC, by 14May2025. 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 (not to exceed 10%)
 - h. Project timeline
 - i. Potential for new innovations (and, if applicable, potential for collaborations/community partnerships)
- 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 Randall Logan, Scientific Director, BioNexus KC by 5:00pm on 25Jul2025. 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 Randall Logan, Scientific Director, 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 <https://grants.nih.gov/grants/funding/phs398/biosketch.doc>) 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 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 Proposal Format

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:

- 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
- f. **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.
- g. 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 <https://grants.nih.gov/policy-and-compliance/policy-topics/peer-review/simplifying-review/framework>).

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 LOI or full proposal application (if invited) to:
Randall Logan, PhD
Scientific Director
BioNexus KC
Email: randy@bionexuskc.org
Subject: Blue KC Research Grant
2. Copy Nerissa Lowe, nerissa@bionexuskc.org on the electronic submission.