VIRGINIA
HEALTH CARE
FOUNDATION

HEALTH ACCESS GRANT GUIDELINES

UPDATED APRIL 2026

VHCF'S MISSION

A public/private partnership, VHCF helps uninsured and medically underserved Virginians obtain primary medical, dental, and mental health care. This work takes many forms: Medicaid outreach and enrollment assistance, assistance with prescription medicines, workforce development, Health Access Grants, and select special initiatives. Via Health Access Grants, VHCF invests in expanding access to primary health care (including behavioral and oral health) services available to uninsured and underserved Virginians and building the capacity of organizations to provide such care. To-date VHCF has enabled more than 900,000 Virginians throughout the state to obtain needed primary care.

These grant guidelines are specific to VHCF's Health Access grants, which are reviewed and awarded in two cycles per year.

HEALTH ACCESS FUNDING PRIORITIES

Grant applicants are encouraged to develop initiatives in the following areas that respond to local needs:

Developing or Expanding Capacity

This includes initiatives that establish new outlets of care for uninsured or medically underserved Virginians, as well as those which enable existing programs to serve a greater number of patients. Examples include proposals to add new primary care providers (*medical, mental health, dental, pharmacists*); undertake a strategic expansion of physical infrastructure; utilize technology to expand access (*e.g., telemedicine*); or seek to implement an innovative model of service delivery.

Establishing a Broader Scope of Services

Some organizations are interested in adding new services to those they currently offer. Proposals to add key primary care services, e.g. mental health, dental; institute programs to enhance care of uninsured, chronically ill patients; or utilize technology (*e.g. telehealth or tele-mental health*) to enhance and expand access to primary care in underserved areas fall within the parameters of this funding track.

Accelerating Licensure of Behavioral Health Professionals

There is a compelling shortage of behavioral health professionals throughout the state. All localities are now federally designated as mental health professional shortage areas. There are many masters-prepared social workers and counselors who require oversight for a defined period of time by a licensed professional in their field, before they can become licensed. VHCF will consider proposals for funding to pay the salary and benefits of these masters-prepared therapists from local organizations that will provide the required oversight from a trained behavioral health professional.

Creating Local Coordinated Systems of Care

VHCF is interested in stimulating and supporting local initiatives that will result in a community-wide coordinated network of care that expands access to clinical health care services for the uninsured and the medically underserved. This funding track is

appropriate for communities where there are several organizations that have a vision of working more closely together to achieve greater synergies and efficiencies both for their patients/clients and for their operations by creating or enhancing interoperability among providers.

VHCF'S APPROACH

VHCF is a public-private partnership, funded by a combination of state and private dollars. The Health Access grant program was established as a venture philanthropy model to expand access to primary, behavioral health, and dental services for uninsured and underserved Virginians. A key component of that mission is long-term sustainability of these essential services, and VHCF reports back to state and private funding sources on the sustainability outcomes of funded initiatives. To support this objective, each proposal is scrutinized thoroughly to ensure strong leadership, a well-articulated vision, a solid business plan, community support, and long-term financial viability. **As a result, 89% of VHCF-funded initiatives continue operating at the same or higher level over 3 years after funding concludes.**

The purpose of Health Access grants is to launch new initiatives, and these grants are eligible to be renewed for up to three years (total). To help organizations achieve long-term sustainability, VHCF funding in the second and third years is 25% less than in each previous year.

APPLICANT ELIGBILITY

The following entities may apply for a grant from the Virginia Health Care Foundation:

- Any public agency or private non-profit holding a 501(c)(3) tax-exemption*; or
- Any affiliate of a 501(c)3 tax-exempt agency;
- Any organization with a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt fiscal sponsor
- If the applicant is a free clinic or a community health center, it must be a member in good standing with either the Virginia Association of Free and Charitable Clinics or the Virginia Community Healthcare Association.
- Current VHCF grantees (in any funding area) may apply for a new HA grant in addition to their existing VHCF grant(s), provided their current grants are either be meeting their stated goals/objectives or on track to meet their stated goals/objectives during the current grant period.
- To be eligible, an applicant organization must have a full-time, paid Executive Director or Chief Executive Officer, or a nonprofit fiscal sponsor with a full-time, paid ED/CEO.

GRANT CRITERIA

The Foundation looks for several key elements in every Letter of Intent and proposal it reviews. A successful proposal will:

- Target a clearly-defined need and/or underserved population;
- Reflect strong organizational and initiative leadership;
- Provide evidence that all necessary logistics have been thought through and that agreements have been established with any collaborating agencies;
- Display broad-based community commitment and collaboration;
- Demonstrate that at least 25% of the initiative's costs are underwritten by the community (*including both cash and in-kind support*);
- Present a viable plan to sustain funding after Foundation funds are depleted;
- Present evidence of how the initiative fits within the applicant's strategic plan and vision for the future; and
- Agree to participate in the Foundation's evaluation of the initiative.

Overall, a successful proposal must demonstrate that all the necessary strategic and logistical planning has taken place, and the organization's management is thoroughly prepared and ready to implement the initiative.

Ineligible Grant Applications Include:

- Requests to supplant existing funding or funding from a previously-existing source, either public or private, which has been reduced or eliminated within the past 5 years;
- initiatives that do not provide direct primary care services;
- the purchase of medical/dental supplies;
- the sponsorship of specific treatment/visit slots for underserved patients;
- student rotations or internships;
- pilot projects;
- specialty care service expansions that lack a primary care focus; or
- Supplantation of currently or recently (within 5 years) existing operations.

GRANT APPLICATION PROCESS

The Foundation has two formal grant cycles each year, beginning in the winter and the summer. The Foundation's grant application process starts with the submission of a Letter of Intent in January and July.

Step One – Submission of a Letter of Intent (LOI)

Please visit VHCF's website, www.vhcf.org to access the current year's deadlines.

If you have an initiative that meets the Foundation's criteria, we encourage you to submit a Letter of Intent via VHCF's grants portal. The Letter of Intent form requests the

following information. Character/word limits are in parenthesis at the end of each section.

- An eligibility quiz about your organization and proposed initiative
- Information about your organization, its service area, and key initiative leadership.
- A concise description of each of the following areas:
    - Expansion of care: Describe the initiative and how it will expand access to care beyond what you are currently providing. Who will be served and in what way. Please quantify the projected impact of your proposed expansion (up to 175 words)
    - Demonstrating need and demand: Provide data to demonstrate the need for the proposed initiative. Prioritize specific data from your organization (e.g. wait list, length of time before an appointment can be scheduled, or number of individuals turned away) (up to 175 words)
    - Proposed timeline for implementing the expansion (up to 175 words)
    - Strategic plan: Provide a brief overview of the organization's strategic plan and how the proposed initiative fits into the plan (up to 175 words)
    - Sustainability: What is your plan to financially sustain the project once VHCF funding ends? Describe local leadership and community financial and in-kind support for the proposed initiative (up to 175 words)
    - Additional Information: Is there anything else VHCF should know about your initiative at this stage? (e.g. you have a clinician in mind to hire, you have secured matching funding, you have piloted the proposed project) (up to 175 words)
    - Artificial Intelligence (AI) Utilization: Did you use AI in the preparation of the language/content provided in this LOI? If so, please describe to what extent it was used, and your process for developing and/or reviewing the content generated (up to 175 words)

Letter of Intent Review Policies:

- VHCF only responds to Letters of Intent, not unsolicited proposals or general fund requests
- An invitation to submit a formal proposal does not guarantee funding. Grants are awarded only after full review, Board approval, and a signed letter of agreement.
- Please do not send attachments of any kind to accompany the Letter of Intent. They will not be reviewed.
- Letters of Intent submitted after the stated deadline will not be reviewed.

The Foundation staff will review Letters of Intent and correspond with applicants regarding requests for full proposals within two weeks of the deadline for submitting LOIs.

Step Two – Formal Proposal

If your concept paper meets the Foundation's criteria, you will be invited to submit a formal proposal via email. A formal proposal must contain:

1. A completed Cover Sheet and Executive Summary form with information about your organization, its service area, and key organization leadership.

2. A concise narrative that describes each of the following:

   - **The need and demand**– Document the specific health need that your proposed initiative will address, **using internal and local data** (*e.g. wait list, length of time before an appointment can be scheduled, or number of individuals turned away*) Additional supporting data may come from secondary sources such as a local Community Health Needs Assessment conducted by your local health department or nonprofit hospital, county health rankings, or the Health Resources and Services Administration (*HRSA*).

   - **Initiative description** – Include specifics about the impact of proposed funding on factors such as staffing levels, patients/clients and patient/client visits, hours of operation, or other indicators; give a "snapshot" of the operation before and after grant funding, showing the difference that the proposed initiative will make. The description should indicate that the planning work for the proposed initiative is complete and thorough, and that the initiative is ready to launch if funded by VHCF;

   - **Funding Priorities** – Describe how the proposed initiative aligns with a Health Access funding priority (*see pages 2-3*);

   - **Community commitment and collaboration** – Demonstrate that the local community is invested in the proposed initiative. Include sources of financial and in-kind support and identify your community partner organizations. Cooperative efforts, shared service provision and attempts to better integrate services within a community are all encouraged;

   - **Initiative management** – Indicate how the individuals who will implement and oversee the initiative are qualified to manage what is proposed and include their resumes and other relevant information about them; A strong management team should have both a demonstrated record of success and sufficient bandwidth to lead the proposed initiative. The organization's Board of Directors should be in place and understand its role in leading the organization and the proposed initiative.

   - **Cost-based and outcome-oriented evaluation plan and criteria** – Include a viable evaluation plan that reflects the quantity and quality of service provided, utilizing a mix of: administrative process measures (*e.g., increasing the number of individuals served from 2,000 per year to 4,000 per year*);

patient-level process measures (*e.g., 100% of patients will be screened for behavioral health needs*); and health outcome measures (e.g., *50% of patients/clients treated for depression or anxiety by a VHCF-funded provider will show meaningful improvement on a PHQ-9 screening*).

- **Sustainability Plan** – Detailed on the provided template, the sustainability should include a long-term vision for sustaining the proposed initiative, as well as a shorter-term, detailed business plan that identifies specific sources of revenue and/or other funding for the proposed initiative during VHCF funding and immediately following its conclusion; and,

- **Strategic Plan/Vision Statement and Organization Leadership** – Detail how this proposed initiative relates to your organization's strategic plan. Also describe the leaders in your organization and the role they will play in planning for the future of the proposed initiative within your organization.

3. A **Proposed Budget with Rationale** should represent all of the revenue and expenses associated for the first year of the specific initiative to be funded. The project budget should be comprehensive (*including line items for personnel and benefits, rent, utilities, medications, lab and diagnostic services, medical supplies, office supplies, travel, insurance, etc.*) and demonstrate sound fiscal planning. If the initiative will be a part of a larger organization, please provide the latest annual budget for the organization as an attachment. Include local public and/or private cash and in-kind contributions equivalent to a minimum match of 25% for funding requested.

   You must use this budget format, and the budget must be accompanied by an itemized rationale. Foundation funds may not be used to pay indirect costs, administrative assessments, or fees of universities or other institutions with which a VHCF initiative is affiliated. *Please note: The Foundation will most favorably review proposals showing the greatest local support.*

Required attachments include, but are not limited to:

- Sustainability Plan on Tab 3 of the budget template for proposed initiative (*please use format supplied by Foundation*).
- Support letters from community partners evidencing the monetary/in-kind resource commitment identified in the proposal and budget. Letters of Support from key collaborators should be included as well. Copies of relevant Memoranda of Agreement or contracts
- Organizational Chart
- A list of the applicant organization's Board of Directors with their business titles or an indication of the special talents they bring to the Board.
- The resume(s) of the individual(s) who will serve as fiscal agent and supervisor of the proposed initiative.
- Evidence of the applicant's tax-exempt status.
- A copy of the applicant's most recent board-approved strategic plan.

- Organization budget for current FY
- Most recent audited financials
- P&L and Balance Sheet within the last three months
- Job descriptions for new positions, if proposal is for added staff
- Organizational chart
- Marketing plan, if applicable

Required formatting:
The *narrative* portion of the proposal should not exceed 10 pages. This 10-page limit does not include the budget forms, the budget rationale, letters of support or other attachments. There is no page limit on attachments, but please ensure that attachments are relevant to the project.

Proposals must:

- be double-spaced in 12 point font with 1 inch margins;
- include page numbers on the narrative portion of the proposal;
- Combine the Proposal Narrative and all attachments as a single PDF; and
- Final PDF must be <25 mb (reduce/condense PDF size, if needed)

Please submit your proposal via email *(making sure to include all attachments in the PDF)* to Kari Parkhurst at kari@vhcf.org. Detailed submission instructions will be included with invitations to submit formal proposals.

Proposal Review Policies:

- Following the submission of a formal proposal, applicants will be expected to participate in a one to two-hour follow-up call/interview with a VHCF Program Officer.
- The Foundation will not review incomplete proposals, or those which do not follow VHCF's specifications.
- The Foundation will not accept any materials, including Letters of Support, received under separate cover.
- If a full proposal is rejected by the VHCF Board of Trustees, the applicant must wait a minimum of 12 months before resubmitting it.

CONDITIONS FOR GRANT ACCEPTANCE

Each grantee must sign a letter of agreement with the Virginia Health Care Foundation that delineates the terms and specific objectives of the initiative.

Each grantee must agree to participate in and assist with an evaluation of its funded initiative, and to submit requested data and reports on a timely basis. An evaluation will be appropriate to the initiative funded. It could measure the number of individuals served; the cost-per-individual; explore patient health status outcomes; and determine the grantee's success in achieving its stated goals and objectives.

During the course of the grant, in the event of any substantive change in the proposed initiative or the management team of the organization or those responsible for managing the initiative, or other findings that could materially alter the nature or successful achievement of the initiative's goals or objectives, VHCF reserves the right to reassess its support of the initiative.